GALAXY

Science Fiction

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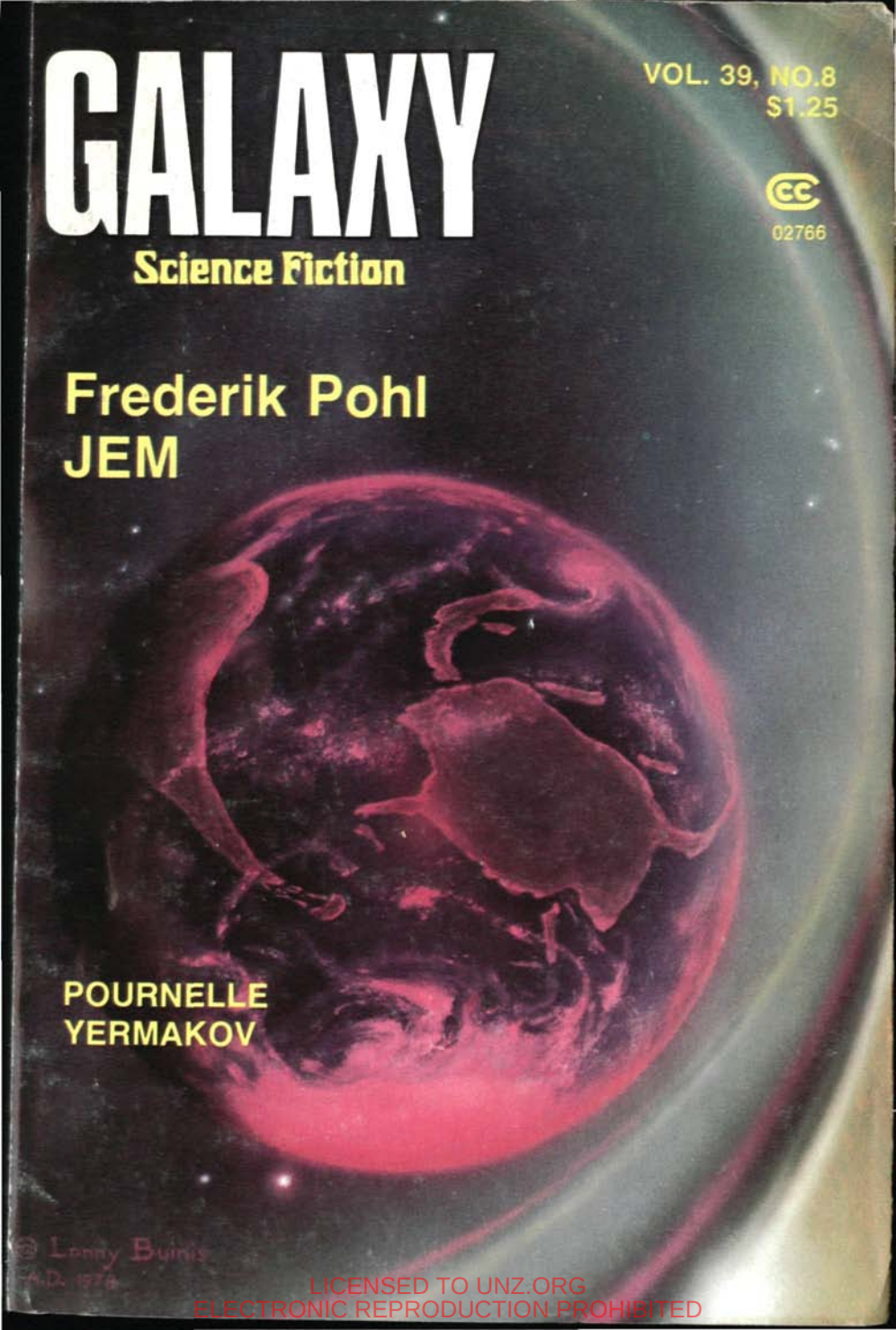
Frederik Pohl
JEM



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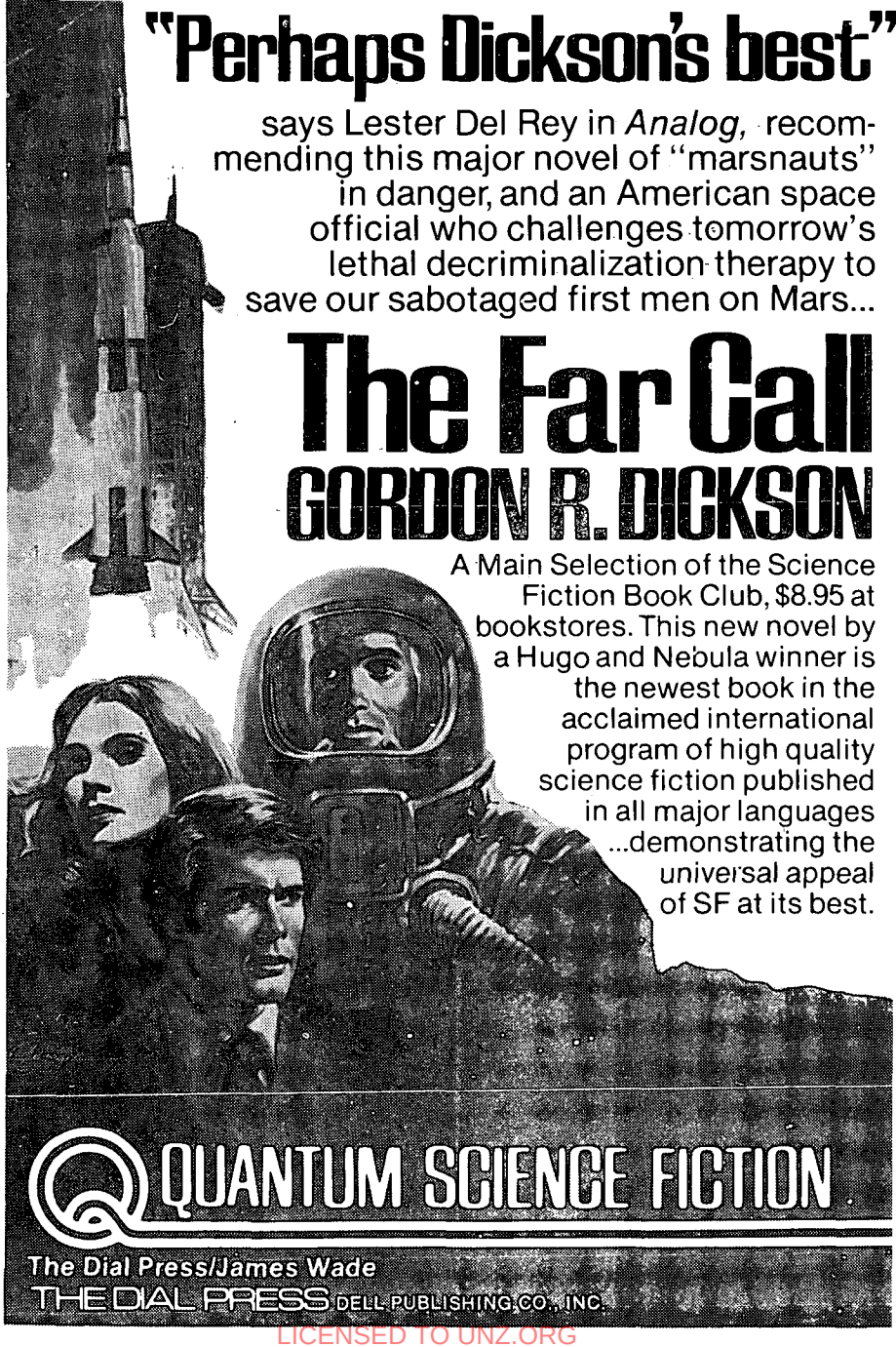

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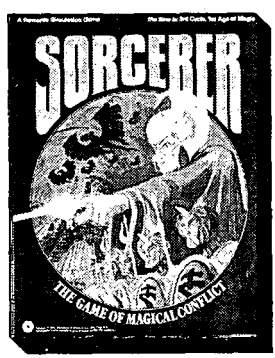

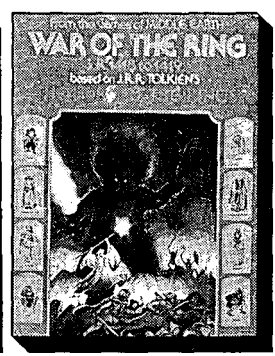

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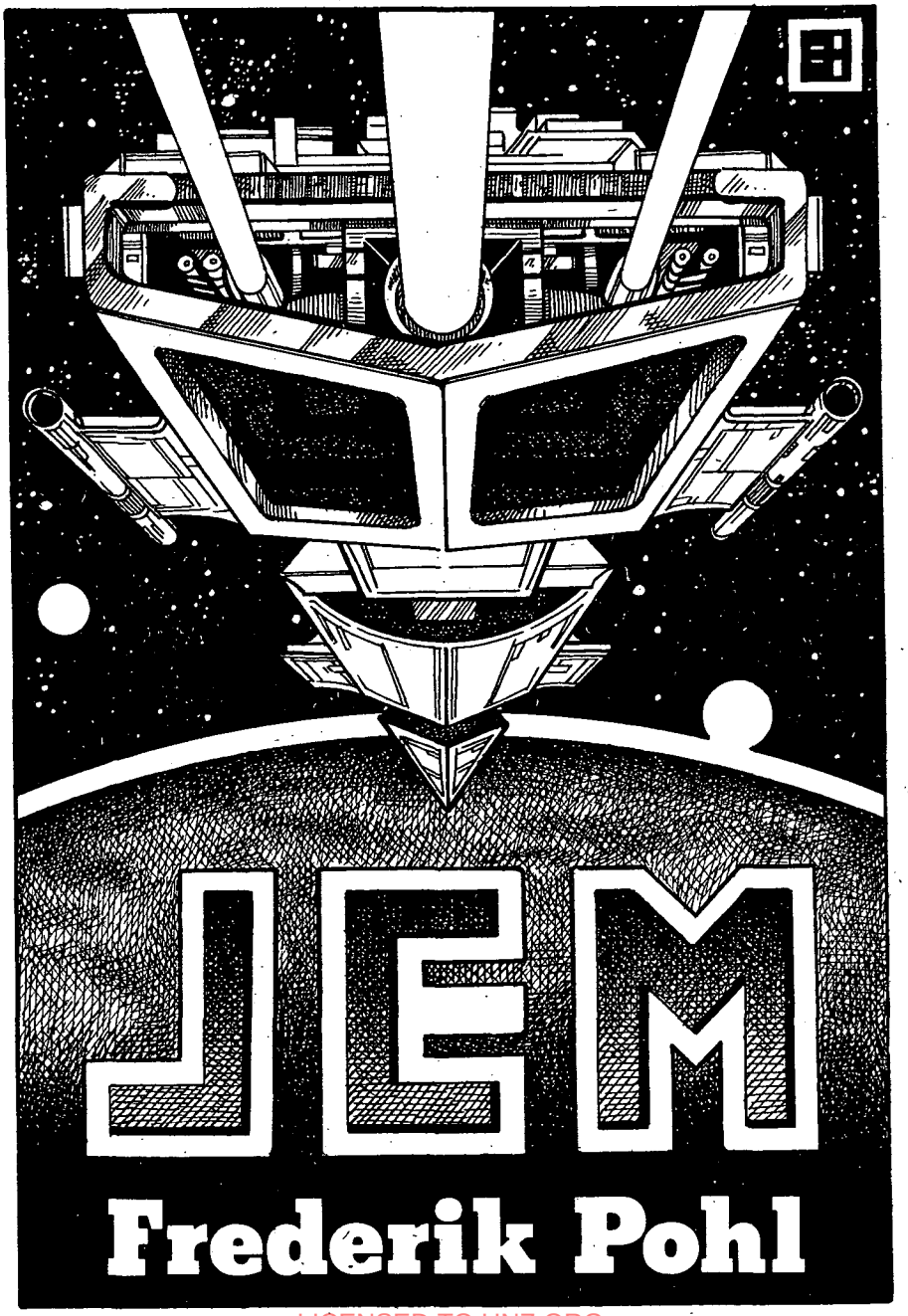

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It wasn't the average human's idea of Paradise. But then, Eden is in the eye of the beholder—and so is the Serpent!

I

WHEN DANNY DALEHOUSE first went to Sofia, he did not know it for the first stage in a much longer journey, nor that he would meet some of his future companions. He had never heard of that larger destination, which bore the unattractive name of N-OA Bes-bes Geminorum 8426, or, for that matter, of the people. Their names were Nan Dimitrova and Captain Marge Menninger. The occasion was the Tenth General Assembly of the World Conference on Exobiology, and the time was not in any way bad for any of them. It was a springtime season, and for a moment there all the world seemed to be building into sweet and friendly life.

There were three thousand people in the Great Hall of Culture and Science for the opening session, so many of them political that the five or six hundred scientists who were actively involved had trouble finding seats. Even the translators were doubled up in their booths. Handsome, hoary old Carl Sagan delivered the opening invocation, looking like a spry octogenarian instead of whatever incredible age he really was. He was already wheeling forward to the rostrum as Dan Dalehouse squeezed into a seat at the back of the hall. Dalehouse had never been in Bulgaria before. He had been drawn to the sunny parks, and promised himself a look at the museum of centuries-old ikons under St. Stephan's Cathedral, a few blocks away. But he didn't want to miss Sagan, and the first plenary session was a tutorial on tactran reports. Some of the stuff he had never heard before. That was probably Sagan's work, he thought. Even as honorary joint chairman, Sagan passed the whole program through his nonsense filter. What was left was sure to be worth hearing. Sagan spoke briefly, and cheeerfully, and rolled away to a standing ovation.

Because the keynote speaker had been an American, the chairman of the tachyon-transmitter tutorial had to be from one of the other blocs. That was international etiquette. He was an Englishman, from Fred Hoyle's Cambridge group. A few of the dignitaries from the Fuel Bloc stayed to hear him out of group sol-

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idarity, but most of the other political people left as inconspicuously as they could, and Dalehouse was able to move up to a better seat on the center aisle.

He settled himself to tolerate the chairman's opening remarks, lulled by the scent of flowers coming through the opening windows—Bulgaria made even less use of air-conditioning than the United States. Since Food and Fuel had already been heard from, protocol required the next space go to People. So it was a Pakistani who read the first paper, entitled "Vital Signatures Reported from Bodies Orbiting Alpha Draconis, Procyon, 17-Kappa Indi and Kung's Semi-Stellar Object."

Dalehouse had been half-drowsing, but as the title came through his earphones he sat up. "I never heard of some of those stars," he remarked to his neighbor. "Who is this guy?"

She pointed to her program and the name:Dr. Ahmed Dullah, Zulkifar Ali Bhutto University, Hyderabad. As Dalehouse leaned over he discovered that the flower scent was not coming from the windows but from her, and he took a closer look. Blonde. A little plump, but with a solid, good natured, pretty face. Hard to tell the age, but maybe about the same as himself, which was mid-thirties. Since his divorce, Dalehouse had become more aware of the sexuality of woman colleagues and chance-met females in general, but also more wary. He smiled thanks and sank back to listen.

The first part was not exciting. The reports on the probe to Alpha Draconis had already been published. He was not greatly interested to hear again about the photometric measurements that established the presence of photosynthetic "plant" life and a reducing atmosphere. There were plenty of planets like that around that had been scanned and reported by the tachyon probes with their cargoes of instruments—the whole thing no bigger than a grapefruit, but miraculously capable of leaping interstellar distances in a week. The Pakistani seemed intent on repeating every word of every one of the reports, not failing to comment on the number of other reducing-atmosphere planets discovered, and the apparent generally low level of evolved life on them. The Procyon probe had lost its lock and the reports were at best ambiguous. Mercifully, Dullah did not dwell on the instrumentation. 17-Kappa Indi sounded better—an oxygen atmosphere, at least, although the temperature range was bad and the signatures were sketchy—but the real prize was at the end.

Kung's Semi-Stellar Object was not much more than a planet itself. As stars went it was tiny, barely big enough to fuse nuclei and radiate heat, but it had a planet that sounded like fun. Hot. Humid. Dense air, but about the right partial pressure of oxygen to be congenial for life—including the life of a exploring human explorative party if anybody cared to spend the money to try it out. And the signatures were first-rate. Carbon dioxide. Traces, but only traces of methane. Good photometry. The only parameters missing were radio wavelengths: otherwise it would have

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sounded a lot like Miami Beach.

The Pakistani then went on to explain how Kung's Star had been discovered by the big fixed radio dish at Nagchhu Dzong, in the Thanglha Hills, and that it had come about as a direct result of the wisdom and example of the late Chairman Mao. That was not in itself very interesting, except to the other members of the People Bloc, who were nodding grave concurrence, but the planet seemed pretty strange. The translation had trouble keeping up with the Pakistani, and it wasn't Dalehouse's area of special interest anyhow, but he made out that the part covered in the biotic study was only a part on one hemipshere. Funny! Nor was he the only one fascinated. He looked up at the bank of translators, each in their individual glass cages, like nailclippers and pocket combs behind the windows of a vending machine. Each booth had its draped scarlet curtains tied back with a gold sash, very Slavic and incongruous, and behind them the translators looked like atronauts in their solid-state communications helmets. One of them was a young girl with a sweet, plain face, beaming forward to stare at the speaker with an expression of either incredulity or rapture. Her lips weren't moving; she seemed to be too entranced to function.

Dalehouse borrowed a pencil from the woman next to him and made a note in the margin of his program: *Invstgt Kungs Star, posbl survey grant*. It was the first time he had ever heard of it.

* * *

What can be said of someone like Danny Dalehouse? Grammar school, high school, college, graduate school; he got his Pretty Heavy Diploma at twenty-six, and jobs were scarce. He managed to teach Freshman Biology for a year, then a year on a grant in Tbilisi, and better than another year of post-doctoral studies, so that he was past thirty before he caught on at Michigan State's new exobiology department. The marriage that had survived a year of living on cheese and white wine in Soviet Georgia began to dissolve in East Lansing. He was medium height, viewed charitably—about one-seventy in his shoes—and slim. He wasn't particularly handsome, either. What he was was smart. He was smart enough so that in three years at Michigan State he had made himself one of the Food Bloc's two experts in reading the telemetry from a tachyon-transmitter probe and translating it into a good guess at how much life the signatures represented, and even what kinds of life. Then he was smart enough to figure out that a telemetry interpreter who got to be nationally known for his skill was going to look too valuable where he was to be risked on a manned expedition to one of those fascinating, remote worlds. So he tapered off on the interpretation and resharpened his skills at mountain-climbing, sailplaning and long-distance running. You never knew what kind of athletic quality you might need, if you were ever lucky enough to be one of the few score people each year who got tossed to another star.

Being divorced was probably a

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plus quality. A man without much home life would be judged better able to concentrate on the job than someone mooning over wife and kids fifty light-years away. Dalehouse hadn't wanted Polly to leave. But when she did pack up and go, he was quick to see that the divorce wasn't all bad.

* * *

That night in the Aperitif Bar he ran into the blonde again. He had gone to listen in on the headliner's news conference, but the crowd at that end of the bar was pretty thick, and most of them seemed to be actual reporters whom he didn't feel justified in shoving aside. Between their heads and cameras he caught glimpses of Sagan and Iosif Shklovski sitting together in their life-support chairs at one end of the narrow room, having their pictures taken, and passing smiling comments and an oxygen mask back and forth to each other. They rolled away toward the elevators, and most of the crowd followed them. Dalehouse stoped for a drink and looked around the bar.

The blonde was drinking Scotch with two small, dark, smiling men—no, he realized; she was drinking Scotch, but they were drinking orange juice.

The men got up and said good night while he was looking for a place to sit down, and he perceived the opportunity. "Mind if I join you? I'm Danny Dalehouse, Michigan State."

"Marge Menninger," she said, and she didn't mind his joining her at all. She didn't mind letting him buy her another Scotch, and she didn't mind buying him one back, and she didn't mind going out for a stroll under the fat Bulgarian spring moon, and she didn't mind going to his room to open his bottle of Bulgarian wine: and altogether, the day when Danny Dalehouse first heard of Kung's Star was a very successful and pleasurable day for him.

The next day, not quite so good.

It began well enough, in the early dawn. They woke in each other's arms and made love again without changing position. It was too early to get anything to eat, so they shared the last of the bottle of wine as they showered and dressed. Then they decided to go for a walk.

It had rained a little during the night. The streets were wet. But the air was warm and in the lovely rose glow of the sunrise, the Maria-Theresa-yellow buildings were warm peach and friendly.

"The next thing I want to do," said Dalehouse expansively, slipping an arm around Margie's waist, "is take a look at Kung's Star."

Marge looked at him with a different kind of interest. "You've got funding for that?"

"Well—"coming down—"no. No, I guess not. MSU launched four tactrans last year, but we've never had a grant for a manned probe."

She butted her head against his shoulder. "You're more of an operator than you look."

"What?"

"You don't come on real strong, Danny Boy, but you know what you're doing every minute, don't you? Like last night. Those two

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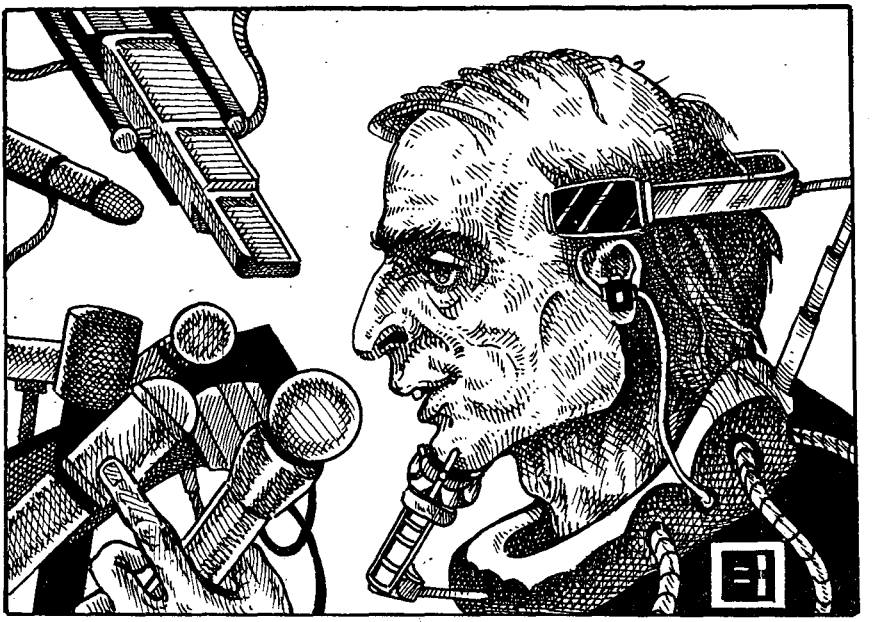

Ay-rabs weren't getting anywhere trying to put the make on me. Then you just eased right in."

"I'm not sure I know what we're talking about."

"No?"

"No, not really." But she didn't seem about to clarify it, so he went back to what really interested him. "That planet sounds pretty great, Margie. Maybe even industry! Did you get that part? Traces of carbon monoxide and ozone."

She objected thoughtfully, "There were no radio signals."

"No. Doesn't prove anything. They wouldn't have heard any radio signals from Earth two hundred years ago, but there was a civilization there."

She pursed her lips but didn't answer. It occurred to him that something was troubling her, perhaps some female thing of the sort that he had never considered himself very good at comprehending. He looked around for something to cheer her up and said, "Hey, look at those fellows."

They were strolling past the Dimitrov Mausoleum. In spite of the hours, in spite of the fact that there was no other human being in sight, the two honor guards stood absolutely immobile in their antic musical-comedy uniforms, not even the tips of the long curled feathers on their helmets quivering.

Margie glanced but, whatever was on her mind, sightseeing was not part of it. "It would be at least a two-year hitch." She said. "Would you really want to go?"

"I, uh, I think I'd miss you, Margie," he said, misinterpreting her point.

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Impatiently, "Ah, no crap. If you had the funding, would you go?"

"Try me."

"That Pak was so flaming pleased with himself. He's probably got it all lined up with Heir-of-Mao for the Peeps to send a manned probe there already."

"Well, that's fine with me, too. I don't want to go for political reasons. I don't care what country meets the first civilized aliens; I just want to be there."

"I care," she said. She slipped free of him to light a cigarette.

Dalehouse stopped and watched her cup her hands around the lighter to shield it from the gentle morning breeze. They had had a good deal to drink and not very much sleep. He could feel a certain interior frailty from the consequences, but Marge Menninger seemed unaffected. This was the first time he had gone to bed with a girl without exchange of several chapters of autobiography. He didn't know her at all in his mind, only through his senses.

The other thing in Dalehouse's thoughts was that in the 10AM session he had a paper to give—"Preliminary Studies toward a First Contact with Subtechnological Sentients"—and he wanted enough time to add some comments about the planet of Kung's Star.

He sneaked a glance at his watch: 7:30, plenty of time. The city was still quiet. Somewhere out of sight he could hear the first tram of the morning. Far down the street they were walking on he could see two city gendarmes, strolling hand in hand, their batons swinging from the outside hands of each. Nothing else seemed to be happening in Sofia. It made him think of his own home in East Lansing at that same promising time of the day and year, when the University was running at half-speed for the summer sessions and on decent mornings Dalehouse walked or biked to his office to enjoy the peace. And, of course, to get out of his empty house.

To be sure, he reminded himself, Sofia was not in the least like East Lansing; flat and urban, where his home was hilly and carpeted with solid quarter-acre split-levels. And Marge Menninger was not in the least like absent Polly, who had been dark, tiny, quick, and easily bored. What exactly was Marge Menninger like? Dalehouse had not quite made up his mind. She seemed to be different people. Yesterday in the Great Hall of Culture and Science she had been another academic colleague, last night exactly what every all-American boy would like to find in his bed. But who was she this morning? They weren't strolling with their arms around each other's waists any more. Marge was a meter away and a little ahead of him, moving briskly, smoking with intensity and staring straight ahead.

She seemed to reach a decision, and glanced at him. "Michigan State University, Institute of Extra-Solar Biology. Daniel Dalehouse, B.A., M.Sc., Ph.D. I guess I didn't tell you that I saw a preprint of your paper before I left Washington."

"You did?" He was startled, not only at the statement but at her knowing his credits.

"Interesting paper, makes me think you're serious about wanting

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to go. Danny boy, I might be able to help you.''

''Help me how?''

''With money, dear man. That's all I've got to give. But I think I can give some to you. In case you didn't notice my name tag when you were taking my clothes off, that's what I do for a living. I'm with SERDCOM.''

''Praise Com from whom all blessings flow,'' Danny said fervently; it was the annual grants from the Space Exploration, Research and Development Commission that kept Dalehouse's Institute green. ''How come I've never seen you when I go to Washington with my begging bowl?''

''I've only been there since February. I'm Vice-Secretary for New Projects. Job didn't exist till the first of the year, and I wangled it. Before then I was teaching the stuff at my alma mater. . .among other subjects; we didn't have much of an extra-solar department. It's a small school, and it fell on hard times even while I was still an undergraduate. Well? What about it?''

''About what?''

''Were you dreaming? Or do you want a grant for a manned trip to Kung's Star?''

''I do! Christ, yes I do, I do.''

She took his hand in one of hers, patted it with the other. ''You may regard it as settled. Hello, what's this?''

''But—''

''I said settled.'' She was no longer looking at him, something had caught her attention. They had come to a large park, and off to their right was a mall leading up to a monument. Flanking the entrance to the mall were two heroic groups of bronze statuary.

Dalehouse followed her toward them, feeling dazed as well as hung over; it had not sunk in yet. ''I suppose I ought to submit a proposal,'' he said tentatively.

''You bet. Send me a draft first before you put it through channels.'' She was examining the bronzes. ''Will you look at this stuff!''

Dalehouse inspected them without interest. ''It's a war memorial,'' he said. ''Soldiers and peasants.''

''Sure, but it isn't that old. That's a tommy-gun that soldier is holding. . .and there's one on a motor bike. And, look, some of the soldiers are women.''

She bent down and inspected the Cyrillic lettering without comprehension. ''Damn. Don't know what it says. But it's the workers and peasants welcoming liberators, right? It has to be the last of the Big Ones—World War Two. Let's see, this is Bulgaria, so that must be the Red Army chasing the Germans out and all the Bulgarians bringing them flowers and hearty fraternal-solidarity handshakes and glasses of clear spring water. Wow. Jesus, Danny, both my grandfathers fought in this war, and one grandmother. Two on one side, one on the other.''

Dalehouse looked at her with amusement and fondness, if not full comprehension; it was strange to find anyone who took such an interest in actual footslogging fighting these days, when everyone knew that war was simply priced out of the market for any nation that wanted to survive. ''What about

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your other grandmother? Some kind of slacker?''

She looked up at him for a moment. ''She died in the bombings,'' she said. ''Hey, this is fun.''

The bronzes were certainly military enough for any war fan. Every figure was expressing courage, joy and resolution in maximum socialist-realist style. They had been sculptured to fit in four-square oblong blocks, with all the figures fitted into each other to conform; they looked a lot like a box of frozen sardines writhing around each other. Margie's interest in the sculpture was itself attracting interest, Dalehouse saw; the gendarmes had reached the end of their beat and were passing nearby on the return, watching benignly.

''What's so much fun about soldiers?'' he asked.

''They're my trade, dear Dan. Didn't you know? Marjorie Maude Menninger, Captain, USA late of West Point, or late of the practically late West Point, as I sometimes say. You should see me in uniform.'' She lighted another cigarette, and when she passed it to him for a drag he realized they had not been tobacco.

She held the smoke, then exhaled it in a long plume. ''Ah, those were the days,'' she said dreamily, gazing at the bronzes. ''Look at that grunt holding the baby up in the air. Know what he's saying to the other soldier? 'Go ahead, Ivan, I'll hold the kid while you rape her mommy. Then you hold the kid and it's my turn.' ''

Dalehouse laughed. Encouraged, Margie went on: ''And that young boy is saying, 'Hey, glorious Red Army soldier, you like my sister? Chocolate? Russki cigaretti?' And the WAC that's taking the flowers from the woman, she's saying, 'So Comrade! Stealing agricultural produce from the people's parks! Make no mistake about it, it's a long time in the camps for you!' 'Course, by the time the Soviets got here the Germans were finished anyhow, but—''

''Margie,'' he said.

''—still it must have been pretty exciting—''

''Hey, Margie! Let's move on,'' he said uneasily. He had suddenly realized that the gendarmes were no longer smiling, and remembered, a little late, that all the municipal police had been given language lessons for the conference.

II

What one could say about Ana Dimitrova was hardly necessary to spell out, because it was apparent on first meeting: she was a sweet, cheerful girl with a capacity for love. Sometimes she had the grinding tension headaches that were typical of the people whose corpus callosum had been cut through, and then she was disoriented, irritable, sometimes almost sick with pain. But she excused herself and bore them in private whenever she could.

An hour earlier she woke up, as she had planned, and stole into the kitchen to make tea with her own hands. No powdered trash for Ahmed! When she brought it in to him he opened these heartbreaking long lashes and smiled at her, crinkling the dark brown eyes. ''You are too good to me, Nah,'' he said in

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Urdu. She set the cup down beside him and bent to touch his cheek with hers. Ahmed did not believe in kissing, except under circumstances which, while she found them enjoyable and desirable, were not included in her present plans.

"Let's get dressed quickly," she proposed. "I want to show you my good monster."

"Monster?"

"You'll see." She escaped his grasp and retreated to the shower, where she let the hot water beat on her temples for a long time. The solidstate helmets often brought on the headaches, and she did not want one today.

Later, while she was drying her long brown hair, Ahmed came in silently and ran his fingers along the narrow scar in her scalp. "Dear Nah," he said, "so much trouble to go to to learn Urdu. I learned it for nothing."

She leaned against him for a moment, then wrapped the towel around herself and scolded, gently, "There is no time for this if we are going to see my monster in the dawn light. Also it was not to learn languages that I had my brain split. It was only to be able to translate them better."

"We would not do such a thing in Pakistan," he said, but she knew he was only being dear.

Outside the bathroom door, listening to him squawk and grumble as the cold water hit him, Nah thought seriously about Ahmed. She was a practical person. She was by no means unwilling to sacrifice a material good for a principle or a feeling, but she preferred to know clearly what the stakes were. For her love game with Ahmed, the stakes were pretty high. Bulgaria, like the Soviet Union, was among the most People-tolerant of the food-exporting nations, but the lines of international politics were still clear. They would be able to see each other only seldom and with difficulty unless one or the other of them renounced citizenship. She knew that one would not be Ahmed.

How deeply did she want to be involved with this dear Pakistani? Could she share a life in the crowded, slow cities of the People Bloc? She had seen them. They were charming enough. But a diet of mostly grain, a nearly total lack of personal machines, the inward-turning of the People Bloc minds—were they what she wanted? Congenial to visit, pleasant and quaint for a day or a month. . .but the rest of her life?

She dressed quickly without deciding the issue: one part of her mind was on what she was doing, the other on rehearsing her plans for that day's work at the conference; nothing was left for Ahmed. She made the bed while he was dressing, put away the washed dishes and glasses and almost tugged him out the door.

The sky was bright pink, but the sun was just appearing; there was time if they hurried. She led him down the stairs, no waiting for the tiny cranked elevator, and out into the courtyard, then quickly away from the university to an intersection of two boulevards. She stopped and turned around. "There, see?"

Ahmed squinted into the sunrise. "I see the cathedral," he grumbled.

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"Yes, that's it. And the monster?"

"Monster? Is it in the cathedral?"

"It *is* the cathedral."

"St. Stephan's is a monster? . . .Oh! Yes, I think I see. Those windows up high they are the eyes? And those windows lined up underneath. They are the teeth.

"It's smiling at us, do you see? And there are the ears, and the nose."

"Ahmed was not looking at the cathedral anymore, but at her. "You are such a strange girl. I wonder what sort of Pakistani you would make."

Nah caught her breath. "No! It's too much. Please don't talk like that." She took his arm. "Please, let's just walk."

"I have not had any breakfast, Ana."

"There's plenty of time." She guided him through the small park to the University, and down toward the larger one. She laughed. "Have you forgiven me for translating you so badly into Bulgarian?"

"I would not have known how bad it was, if you had not told me."

"It was bad enough, Ahmed. I was looking at you when you were talking about this Kung's Star, and I forgot to translate."

He glanced at her cautiously. "Do you know," he said, "Heir-of-Mao is personally interested in this planet. It was he who chose the name for the quasistellar object. He was there at the Observatory while it was discovered. I think—'

"What do you think, Ahmed?"

"I think exciting things will happen," he said obscurely.

She laughed and lifted his hand to touch her cheek.

"Aha," he said, and stopped in the middle of the boulevard. "Listen to me. It is not impossible, you know. Even if I were to be away for a time, after that, for you and me, it would not be impossible.

"Please, dear Ahmed—"

"It is not impossible! I know," he said bitterly, oblivious of the fact that they were standing in the middle of the road, "that Pakistan is a poor country. We do not have food to export, like you and the Americans, and we do not have oil like the Middle Eastern States and the English. So we join with the countries that are left."

"I respect Pakistan very much."

"You were a child when you were there," he said severely. "But all the same it is not impossible to be happy, even in the People Bloc."

A trolleybus was coming, three cars long and almost silent on its rubber-tired wheels. Nah tugged him out of the way, glad for the chance to change the subject.

The difficulty with international conferences, she thought, was that you met political opponents and sometimes they did not seem like opponents. She had not meant this involvement with someone from the other side. She certainly did not want its inconvenience and pain. She knew what the stakes were. As a translator with four fully mastered languages and half a dozen partials, she had been all over the world—largely within the Food Bloc, to be sure, but even so that included Moscow and Kansas City and Rio

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and Ottawa. She had met defectors from the other sides. There had been a Welsh girl in Sydney; there were two or three Japanese on the faculty of the University, her own neighbors in Sofia. They always tried desperately to belong, but they were always different.

Both the morning and Ahmed were too beautiful for such unhappy thoughts. That part of her mind which daydreamed and worried went from worry to daydream; the other part of her mind, the perceiving and interpreting part, had been following some events across the boulevard, and now commanded her attention.

"Look," she said, clutching at an excuse to divert Ahmed's single track of attention, "what is that going on over there?" It was on the Liberation Mall. The blonde woman she had seen at one of the receptions was having an argument with two militiamen. One had her by the arm. The other was fingering his stun-stick and talking severely to another man, a youngish professorial type, also from the conference.

Ahmed said, uninterested, "Americans and Bulgarians. Let the fats settle their problems between themselves."

"No, really!" Nah insisted. "I must see if I can help."

But in the long run all that Nah Dimitrova succeeded in accomplishing was to get herself arrested too.

It was the American woman's fault. Even an American should have known better that to make chauvinist-filth jokes about the Red Army within the hearing of the police of the capital of the most Russophile of nations. If she hadn't known that much, at least she should have known better than to insist on her treaty right to have the American Ambassador informed of the incident. Up to that point, the militiamen were only looking for a convenient point at which to finish reprimanding the culprits and stroll away. After that, it was a matter with international repercussions.

The only good thing about it was that Ahmed didn't get involved. Nah sent him away. He left willingly enough, even amused. The rest of them, the two Americans and Nah herself, all got taken to the People's Palace of Justice. Because it was a Sunday morning, they had to sit for hours on bare wood benches in an interrogation room until a magistrate could be found.

No one used the room to interrogate them. No one would have minded in the least, Nah was sure, if they had accepted the invitation of the open door and slipped silently away. But she did not want to do that by herself. The Americans were not willing to take the chance, the woman because she appeared to think some sort of principle was involved, the man evidently because the woman was involved. She eyed them with displeasure, especially the bleached blonde, at least five kilos too well fed, even for the Food Bloc. You cannot choose your allies, she thought. The man seemed to be all right. Not too fastidious about whom he indulged his sexual pranks with. Still, as the time passed, and the militiamen brought them croissants and strong tea, the confinement drew them together. They chatted cheerfully enough, until the People's Magis-

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trate at last arrived, gruffly refused to hear any talk of treaties or Ambassadors, instructed them in future to use the common sense God had given them and the good manners their mothers had no doubt taught them and let them go.

By then they had completely missed the 10 AM session of the conference. Almost as bad, they had missed the special lunches arranged for the delegates. As it was a Sunday morning in spring, every restaurant in Sofia was booked full with private wedding parties and none of them got any lunch at all.

That was the first time the three of them met.

The second was very much later, and very, very far away.

Danny Dalehouse found that a colleague had read his paper for him. So missing the morning session turned out not to have been an utter disaster, and in fact looked like producing a hell of a big plus. Margie was bright enough to realize she'd been dumb, and ego-strong enough to admit it. However serious or otherwise Margie had been about the grant strolling down the boulevard, full of wine, pot and roses, now she was rueful enough to remember her promise.

All the way home from the conference in the clamjet, Dalehouse sat with his notebook on his knee, drawing up a proposal, until it was time to go to his bunk. By dawn they were over white-and-brown Labrador, the jet moving more slowly through the cold night air. Dalehouse ate his breakfast alone, except for a sleepy TWA stewardess to scramble his eggs and pour his coffee, looking out at the clouds as the clamjet roller-coasted in and out of them, and wondering what the planet of Kung's Star would be like.

III

The day after Marge Menninger got back to her Washington office, she received Dalehouse's preliminary written proposal. But she had already begun the process of getting it granted.

She had left the conference early to catch a ride on a NASA hydrojet, a rough and expensive ride but a fast one, back to her apartment in Houston. From there she had called the Deputy Undersecretary of State for Cultural Affairs. It was after office hours, but she got through with no trouble. Marge was on easy terms with the Deputy Undersecretary. She was his daughter. Once she had told him she'd had a pleasant trip she came right to the point: "Pappa, I need a grant for a manned interstellar flight."

There was a short silence. Then he said, "Why?"

Marge scratched under her navel, thinking of all the reasons she could have given. For the advancement of human knowledge? For the potential economic benefit of the United States and rest of the food-producing world? For the sake of her promise to Danny Dalehouse? All of these were reasons which were important to her; but to her father she gave only the one major reason that prevailed: "Because if we don't do it the son-of-a-bitching Paks will."

"By themselves?" Even three thousand kilometers away, she heard the skepticism.

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"The Chinese will put up the hard stuff. They're in it, too."

"You know what it's going to cost." It wasn't a question; they both knew the answer. Even a tachtran message capsule cost a couple millions dollars to transport from one star system to another, and they weighed only a few kilos. What she had in mind was at least ten people with all their gear: she was asking for billions of dollars.

"A lot," she said, "but it's worth it."Her father chuckled admiringly. "You've always been the most expensive of my children, Margie. How are you going to get it past the joint committee?"

"I think I can. Let me worry about that, poppa."

"Um. Well, I'll help from this end. What do you want from me right now?"

Marge hesitated. It was an open phone connection, and so she chose her words carefully. "I asked that Pak for a copy of his full report. Of course, I'm a little handicapped until I get my hands on it."

"Of course," her father agreed. "Anything else?"

"There's not much I can do until I see the full report."

"I understand. Well. What else is new? How did you like our brave Bugarian allies?"

She laughed. "I guess you know. I got arrested."

"I only wonder it doesn't happen more often. Youre a terrible person, love. You didn't get it from *my* side of the family."

"I'll tell Mom you said that," she promised, and hung up; and so by the time she was back in Washington and Dalehouse's proposal was on her desk she had already received, by a different route, a microfilmed copy of the Pakistani's entire report, already translated for her. She read them both over diligently, making notes. Then she pushed them away and leaned back in her chair thoughtfully.

The son-of-a-bitching Pak had held back a *lot*. In his private report, three times as thick as the one he had read from in Sofia there was an inventory of major life forms. He hadn't mentioned that at all in Sofia. At least three species seemed to possess some sort of social organization: a kind of arthropod; a tunneling species, warm-blooded and soft-skinned; and an avian species—no, not avian, she corrected herself. They spent most of their time in the air, but without having developed wings. They were balloonists, not birds. *Three* social species! At least one of them might well be intelligent enough to be civilized.

That brought her back to Danny Dalehouse, his paper on first contact with sentient life forms at the sub-technological level, and his draft proposal. She looked again at the bottom line of the proposal and grinned.

Young Danny didn't have any hangups about asking for what he wanted. The bottom line was seventeen billion dollars.

Seventeen billion dollars, she reflected, was about the assessed valuation of Manhattan Island. . .the GNP of any of twenty-five or thirty of the world's nations. . .about two months' worth of the United States fuel deficit in the balance of payments. It was a lot of money.

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She put the papers and her notes in a bright red folder stamped MOST SECRET and locked them away. Then she began to get Danny Dalehouse what he wanted.

There is a lot to be said about Marge Menninger, and the most important thing is that she always knew what she wanted. She wanted a lot, and a lot of different things. Her motivations were clearly and hierarchically marked in her mind. The third or fourth thing down from the top was likely to be achieved. The second was a near certainty. But the one on top was ironbound and foolproof.

A week later she had Dalehouse's final proposal and an appointment to testify before the House-Senate Joint Committee on Space Development. She used the week to good purpose, first to tell Dalehouse (on the phone, and spelled out by facsimile immediately afterward) how to change his proposal to maximize its chances of approval, then to fill in the quite few gaps in her knowledge of what was required.

To throw a transmitter capsule or a shipload of human beings from one star to another you first have to put them in orbit.

Tachyon transportation itself is a model of technological elegance. Once you have elevated your capsule to its proper charge state it becomes obedient to tachyonic laws. It moves easily at faster-than-light speeds, covering interstellar distances to any point in the Galaxy in a matter of days. It uses surprisingly little energy in the process. The paradox of the tachyon is that it requires more energy to go slow than to go fast.

Getting the capsule to the charge state is the hardest part. For that you need a rather bulky launch platform. The platform is expensive. More than that, it is heavy.

Getting the platform into orbit is not elegant at all. It is brute force. A hundred kilograms of fuel have to burn for every gram launched in the tachyon state. Fuel is fuel. You can burn oil, or you can burn something you make by using oil to make it; say, liquid hydrogen and liquid oxygen. Either way, in excess of half a million metric tons of oil had to burn to get ten people and minimum equipment on their way to Kung's Star.

Half a million metric tons!

It wasn't just the dollar value. It was four supertankers full of fuel, all of which had to come from one of the fuel-exporting nations, which were showing signs of throwing their weight around again.

The Quip-Three interbloc conferences on Quotas for imports and Prices were going badly for the food-exporting countries. If Marge didn't get the expedition well begun, with the necessary fuel tucked away in the big tank farms at Galveston or Bayonne, the increasing fuel prices would drive the costs well past even Danny Dalehouse's figures.

When all the figures were safely transferred from paper to the inside of her head, Marge locked her desk in the Washington office. She headed for Hearing Room 201 in the old Rayburn Office Building, with the knowledge that her work was cut out for her.

The obstacles might have deterred another person. Marge did

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not accept deterrence. Her disciplined mind dissected the immediate problem into its component parts, and she concentrated her attention on the attack for each. The problem with Joint Committee separated easily into four components: The Chairman, the Minority Leader, the Chief Counsel for the Committee, and Senator Lenz. She prepared her strategies for each.

The Minority Leader was her father's friend, and could safely be left to him.

The Chairman was ambitious to be President. He would be likely to make waves whenever he saw a chance for publicity. The way to deal with him was to keep a low profile, and to give him as little opportunity to take a campaign position as possible. After she was

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sworn in and read her prepared statement, he was the first to question her.

The Chairman: Well, madam, I'm sure your motives are of the worthiest, but do you know how hard we're working here on the Hill to keep the deficit down?
Captain Menninger: I certainly do, Mr. Senator.
The Chairman: And yet you expect us to give you God knows how many billion dollars for this project?

That was promising! He hadn't said "this harebrained project" or "this preposterous extravagance."

Captain Menninger: I don't "expect" it, Senator. I hope for it. I hope the Committee will approve the proposal, because in my judgment it is an investment that will be returned many-fold, for years and years to come.
The Chairman: We can't spend the taxpayer's money on hopes.
Captain Menninger: I know that and appreciate it. It isn't hope that I'm asking you to share. It's judgment. Not only mine, but the collective judgment of the best-informed experts in this area.
The Chairman: Um. Well, there are many worthy claims based on very sound judgment. We can't grant all of them.
Captain Menninger: Of course, Senator. I wouldn't be here if I weren't confident of your fairness and competence.
The Chairman: Well, do any of my distinguished colleagues have questions for this witness?

They did, but they were mostly perfunctory. The important people, like Senator Lenz and the Minority Leader, held back for another occasion; the minor members were principally concerned with getting their own positions on record.

The Chief Counsel was a trickier problem. He was smart. He was also wholly dedicated to making his bosses look good by keeping the Joint Committee out of trouble. Margie's hope was to make saying yes look less troublesome than saying no.

Mr. Gianpaolo: You spoke of returns on an investment. Do you mean actual cash, or some abstract kind of knowledge or virtue?
Captain Menninger: Oh, both, Mr. Gianpaolo.
Mr. Gianpaolo: Really, Ms. Menninger? *Dollar* returns?
Captain Menninger: Based on prior experience and what is already known about this planet, yes. Definitely.
Mr. Gianpaolo: Can you give us an idea of what these dollar returns will be?
Captain Menninger: In broad terms, yes, Mr. Gianpaolo. The tachtran reports indicate valuable raw materials and the presence of intelligent life—at least, a near certainty of the former, and strong possibility of the latter. Of course, these are only instrument reports.

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Mr. Gianpaolo: Which, as I understand, are subject to conflicting interpretations.

Captain Menninger: Exactly, Mr. Gianpaolo, and that is why it is necessary to send a manned expedition out. The whole reason for the expedition is to find out what we can't find out in any other way. If we knew what it would find, we wouldn't have to send it. But there is a different kind of return that I think is even more important. I think of it as "leadership."

Mr. Gianpaolo: Leadership?

Captain Menninger: The whole free world of food-exporting nations looks to us for that leadership, Mr. Gianpaolo. I don't believe any of us wants to fail them.

This opportunity that comes only once in a lifetime. I am here because I cannot in all conscience take the responsibility for losing it. It is in the final analysis, this Committee's burden to carry.

Since nothing would be decided in open session, Marge was confident there would be time to make the members understand that the "burden" could best be unloaded by voting her the money.

If Marge Menninger had had her druthers, the testifying would have stopped there. But Gianpaolo was orchestrating the event. He was too wise to end on the note she preferred. He blunted her dramatic impact by dragging out from her a long series of technical data—"Yes, Mr. Gianpaolo, I understand that the planet's surface gravity is point seven six that of Earth, and its atmospheric pressure about thirty per cent higher. But the oxygen level is about the same." He read her quotes about the "semi-greenhouse effect" and asked her what was meant by someone's remarks about "the inexhaustible reserve of outgassing from the cold side, as interior heat boils out volatiles." He got her, and himself, into a long complication about whether the designation of the star they were talking about was really Bes-bes Geminorum 8326 or Bes-bes Geminorum 8426 according to the New OAO General Catalogue—apparently both were given, because some typist made a mistake—until the chairman got restive. Then, satisfied that the audience was more than half asleep, he called for a ten-minute recess and returned to the attack.

Mr. Gianpaolo: Captain Menninger, I'm sure you know what it cost to launch a tachyon-transmitted space vessel.

First—

Capt. Menninger: Yes, sir, I believe I do.

Mr. Gianpaolo: First there is the immense expense of the launching vehicle itself. The costs for that alone, I believe, are in the neighborhood of six billion dollars.

Capt. Menninger: Yes, sir. But, as the Vice President announced in his message to the Tenth General Assembly of the World Conference on Exobiology, we already have such a launch vehicle. It can be used for a large number of missions.

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Mr. Gianpaolo: But, as the Vice President also announced, the time of that vehicle is fully booked. Prelaunch aiming time is as much as thirty days.
Capt. Menninger: Yes, sir.
Mr. Gianpaolo: But your schedule calls for a launch to this—what is the name of it?
Capt. Menninger: It has been referred to as "Son of Kung," sir, but that name is not official.
Mr. Gianpaolo: I hope not. You want a launch every ten days?
Capt. Menninger: Yes, sir. Essential backup.
Mr. Gianpaolo: Which means cancelling the mining survey mission to Procyon IV. I am sure you know that this planet has been identified as having a very dense core, with therefore a good potential for supplies of uranium and other fissiles for our power plants.

The British had sent that probe out. Meticulously they had announced that under existing international agreements they were making the telemetry public. That was all public knowledge. Gianpaolo was just getting it on the record.

Capt. Menninger: Yes, sir. Of course, that works out as a very marginal operation, considering the investment necessary to mine and refine uranium, and to ship it to us back here. The Bes-bes Geminorum planet has much more potential—as I have already testified.
Mr. Gianpaolo: Yes, Captain Menninger, you have made us aware of your opinions.

And that was all hogwash. What the British had *not* announced, but what both Marge and Gianpaolo knew from previous briefing, was that British scintillation counters had found no ionizing radiation to speak of in Procyon Four's rather unpleasant atmosphere. Uranium there might be, but if so it was thousands of meters deep. Marge was getting on the record too, although this particular record was private.

By the time she was through testifying she was satisfied that things were moving in the right direction.

Remained the problem of Senator Lenz. He had far more muscle in the Committee, and in the Senate generally, than anyone else. Even the Chairman. He had to be dealt with individually and privately, and Marge had plans for that.

She booked her return to Houston the long way around, by way of Denver. Her father drove her to Dulles Airport in his own car. Well, actually it wasn't his own. It belonged to a government agency. So did Godfrey Menninger, when you came right down to it. The car was both a perquisite of rank and an indispensable necessity in what he did for the agency; twice a day, other employees of the agency went over it with electronic sniffers and radio probes to make sure it had been neither bombed nor bugged.

God Menninger told his daughter, "You did pretty well at the hearing."

"Thanks, poppa. And thanks for that Pak's report."

"Had what you wanted in it?"

"Yep. Will you talk to the Minority Leader for me?"

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"Already have, honey."

"And?"

"Oh, he's all right. If you get past Gus Lenz, I think you've got the committee taken care of. He didn't say much at the hearing."

"I didn't expect him to."

Her father waited, but as Marge did not go on he did not pursue the question. He said, "There's a follow-up on your Pakistani friend, He's at some kind of a meeting at K'ushui, along with some pretty high-powered people."

"K'ushui? What the hell is K'ushui?"

"Well," said her father, "I kind of wish I could give you a better answer than I know. It's a place in Sinkiang Privince. We haven't had, uh, very full reports yet. But it's not far from Lop Nor, and not *too* far from the big radio dish, and Hair-of-Mao's been there five or six times in the past year."

"It sounds as though they're going to move."

"I would say so. I plugged in your estimates, and the best interpretation is that Heir-of Mao's starting to do what you want us to do."

"Shit!"

"Not to worry," said her father. "I told that the Minority Leader, in strictest confidence. And I have no doubt he'll tell Gianpaolo. So it'll work for you, you know."

"I wanted to be first!"

"First doesn't always pick up the marbles, honey. How many people discovered America before the English put it in their pocket? Anyway, tell me what's so interesting about this planet."

Margie looked out at the high-rise apartments in the Virginia suburbs, ziggurats climbing away from the south exposure with the black-on-black textured squares of their solar heating panels. "It was all in Ahmed Dullah's report, poppa."

"I didn't read it."

"Pity. Well, there's a little star with a lot of crummy little planets and one big one. About the size of the Earth. Gravity's a little lighter. Air's a little denser. It's a lot of real estate, poppa. And it reeks of life."

"We've found life before."

"Mosses and jellyfish! Crystal Things that you can *call* alive if you want to. This is different. This is a biota as varied as our own, maybe. Maybe even a civilization. The planet's interesting in another way, too. It doesn't rotate, I mean relative to its primary—like the Moon doesn't rotate relative to the Earth. So the lit side of it has a sun in the sky all the time—"

Her father listened comfortably, scratching his abdomen just below the navel, while his daughter went on about the planet. When she paused for breath, he said "Wait a minute, honey." He leaned forward to turn on the radio; even in a routinely debugged car God Menninger didn't take chances. Over the twang of synthetic guitars he said, "There's something else you ought to know. The fuel countries are talking among themselves about a sixty per cent price rise."

"Jesus, poppa! I'll never drink another shot of Scotch!"

"No, it's not the British this time. It's the Chinese, funnily enough."

"But they're people-exporters!"

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"They're anything-they-like exporters," her father corrected. "The only reason they're in the People Bloc is that they can swing more weight there. Heir-of-Mao plays his own game. This time he slipped the word to the Greasies that China was going to raise its own prices unilaterally, whatever the bloc votes to do. So that was all the hard-liners in Caracas and Edinburgh needed. The Saudis were for it, of course. They want to stretch out what oil they've got left. And the Indonesians and the rest of the little ones just have to go along with the big boys." He paused, thoughtfully. "So your coming along with a chit for half a million tons of oil gets a little complicated right now."

"I see that, poppa. What are we going to do? I don't mean about my project, I mean the country."

"What we are not going to do," he said grimly, "is raise grain prices. We can't. Heir-of-Mao's joker is that the price rise is for export sales only. He considers any sales inside the People Bloc as domestic. So he's selling cheap to the Peeps, and that means they're getting what they need for irrigation and fertilizer at bargain basement prices. If we raise the price we'll make it worth their while to stop importing in another three or four years. We could stand it in this country, maybe. But the Soviets, the Indochinese, the Bulgarians, the Brazilians and the rest of the Latins—they couldn't handle it. Their economics would be wrecked. It would break up the bloc. No doubt that's what Heir-of-Mao has in mind."

He parked the car in the Dulles short-term lot. Before snapping off the radio he said, "It won't happen for a couple of months, I think. So you want to get your project on the ways as fast as you can."

Marge slid out into the damp, hot Virginia evening air. The humped backs of boarding clamjets loomed over the parking lot hedge. They could hear the noise of two of them warming up, and the gentler rush of another taking off.

Marge followed her father as he picked up her bag and started toward the terminal. "Poppa," she said, "can I tell the senator about, uh, that?"

"Christ, no! Not that he doesn't probably know it already. But *you* aren't supposed to know."

Surprisingly, she laughed. "Well, I was going to handle it a different way anyway. Hey, hold it, poppa. I'm not taking the Houston flight."

"You're not?"

"Uh-uh. I'm going home by a different route."

Menninger kissed his daughter good-by at the check-in counter for the Denver clamjet. He watched her disappear into the gate tunnel with mingled admiration and rue. He had been thinking about asking just how she proposed to handle Senator Lenz, but he didn't have to. This was the flight Lenz would be on.

Because it was a night flight, the jet sat there for twenty minutes of preheating before it could take off. The passengers had to be aboard, and the stews scurried up and down with ear-stoppers and sympathy. The best heat source there is is a jet turbine. The engines that would thrust the plane through the air in actual flight were now rotated inward, the shell-shaped baffles

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diverting the blast to pour countless thousands of BTU's into the clam-shaped lifting section.

Marge took advantage of the time to scrub her face, brush her hair, and change her makeup. She had seen the senator come aboard. She debated changing from her uniform into something more female and decided against it. Wasn't necessary. Wasn't advisable: it might look calculating, and Marge calculated carefully ways to avoid looking calculating.

The full-energy roar of the warm-up jets stopped, and everyone belted in for takeoff. That was a gentler sound. The clamjet bounced a few times and soared steeply up.

As soon as they were at cruising altitude Marge left her cubicle and ordered a drink in the forward first-class lounge. In a couple of minutes Senator Lenz was standing over her, smiling.

Adrian Lenz had two terms and two days seniority in the Senate; a friendly governor had appointed him to fill a forty-eight hour vacancy, just for the sake of the extra rank it would give him over other senators elected the same year. Even so, he was not much over forty. He looked younger than that. He had been divorced twice. The Colorado voters laughed about their swinging senator's bad luck, but re-elected him without much fuss. He could have been chairman of his own committee. He had chosen instead to serve on committees that were of more interest—and more visibility: one of these days "Gus" Lenz was going to be the President of the United States, and everyone knew it. "Margie," he said, "I knew this was going to be a nice flight; until now I didn't know why."

Margie patted the seat beside her. "You going to give me my seventeen billion?" she asked.

Lenz laughed. "You don't waste time, Margie."

"I don't have time to waste. The Peeps are going to go there if we don't. They're probably going to go anyhow. It's a race."

He frowned and nodded toward the stewardess: slight, dark; she wore her United Air Lines uniform like a sari. When the drinks were served he said, "I listened to your testimony, Margie. It sounded good. I don't know if it sounded seventeen billion dollars' worth of good."

"There was some material in the supplementary statement you might not have had a chance to read. Did you notice the part about the planet having its own sun?"

"I'm not sure."

"It's small, but not very far away. The thing mostly radiates in the lower wavelengths. There's not too much visible light. But a hell of a lot of heat. And the planet doesn't turn in relation to it, so it's always hanging there."

"So?"

"So *energy*, Senator. Solar power! Economical."

"I don't understand exactly what you're saying. You mean this substellar thing is hotter than our sun?"

"No, it's not nearly as hot. But it's a lot closer, so that's all right. The important thing is it doesn't move. What's the big problem with solar power here? The sun. It doesn't stay put. It wanders around, all over the sky, and half the time

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it's not in the sky at all because it's night here and so the sun's on the other side of the Earth. I mean: look at our ship here. We had to preheat for nearly half an hour to get the gas light enough to lift, because it's after dark. On the side of the planet that faces its sun—the only side that interests me, Gus—it's never dark."

Lenz nodded and sipped his drink, waiting for more.

"It's never dark. It's never winter. The sun stays put, so you don't have to make your Fresnel lenses movable. And almost as important, the weather isn't a problem. You know what the score is on our own solar-power installations. Not counting clamjets in the daytime—because they're up over the clouds a lot of the time—we lose as much as twenty-five per cent working time because the clouds cut out the sunlight."

Lenz looked puzzled. "This planet doesn't have any clouds?"

"Oh, sure. But they don't matter. The radiation is almost all heat, and it punches right through the clouds! Figure it out. Here we lose half the solar-generating time to night. Another few per cent to dawn and dusk, because the sun's so low it doesn't yield much power. As much as sixty per cent additional for half the year because it's winter. And another twenty-five per cent to cloud-cover. Put them all together and we're lucky to get ten per cent utilization. On this planet a cheaper installation can get damn near a hundred per cent."

Lenz thought about that for a moment. "Sounds interesting," he said cautiously, and signaled for a refill. Margie left him to sort things out in his own mind. Sooner or later it would occur to him to ask what good energy some hundred light-years away was going to do the voters in the State of Colorado on Earth. She had an answer for that, too, but she was content to wait until he asked for it.

But when he asked a question it caught her by surprise. "Margie? What've you got against the Paks?"

"Paks? Why—nothing, really."

"You seem to take this Ahmed's competition pretty seriously."

"Not on a personal level, Gus. I'm not *crazy* about Paks. But I've been on friendly terms with some. I had a Pak orderly when I was teaching at West Point. Nice kid. Kept my clothes ironed and never bothered me when I didn't want him around."

"That sounds like a nice appliance to own," Lenz observed.

"Yeah, yeah. I take your point." She stopped to think. "That's not where it's at, though. I'm not against Ahmed because he's a Pak. I'm against the Paks because they're the other side. I can't help it, Senator. I root for my team."

"Which is who, Margie? Just the Food Bloc? Just the United States? Maybe just the female commissioned officers of the U.S. Army?"

She giggled confortably. "All of them, in that order," she agreed.

"Margie," he said seriously, "we're just shooting the bull here over a couple of drinks. I don't want to get too heavy."

"Why not, Gus? Order up a couple more drinks and let's get to it!"

He obeyed. While they were

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coming he said, "You're a nice girl, Margie, but a little too bloody-minded. Pity you went to West Point."

"Wrong, Gus. The pity is that so few young Americans have the chance now."

He shook his head. "I voted to phase down the service academics and cut the military budget."

"I know you did. Worst vote you ever cast."

"No. There was no choice. *We can't afford war, Margie.* Can't you understand that? Even Pakistan could blow us off the map! Not to mention the Chinese and the Turks and the Poles and the rest of the People Bloc. Not to mention the British, the Saudis, the Venezuelans. We can't afford to fight anybody, and nobody can afford to fight us. And everybody knows it. They're not our enemies—"

"But they're competing with us, Senator," said Captain Menninger, suddenly sitting up straighter and speaking with more precision. "Economically. Politically. Every other way. Remember Klausewitz: war is the logical extension of politics. I grant," she said quickly, "that we can't go that far. We don't want to blow up the planet. I know what you're saying. It's like that famous saying of, what was his name, the Russian cosmonaut? Years and years ago. Sevastianov, I think: 'When I was in space I saw how tiny the world was, and realized how important it was for all of us to learn to live together on it.' Well, sure, Gus. But learning to live together doesn't mean that some people can't live a little better than others. It's a fact of life! The Fuel people keep jumping their prices. And the People people keep demanding more money for their export workers, or else they'll keep them home, and what will we do for orderlies and airline stewardesses? And we compete back. Well, Gus, when I compete I compete hard. I play to win! This Kung's Star planet is something I want to win. I think there're goodies on this planet. I want them for *us*. Us being defined as the Food Bloc, the United States, the State of Texas, the city of Houston and all the other subdivisons you named or want to name, including blonde ex-professors from West Point, if you like, in descending order or size of community. Whichever community you want to talk about, if it's mine, I want it to be first, best, and most successful! I think that's what they call patriotism, Senator. I really doubt that you want to knock it."

He looked at her thoughtfully over the new drinks, and raised his. "To you, Margie. You really are some kind of iron-pants."

She laughed. "All right," she said, softening. "I'll drink to that. Now what about my bill?"

Lenz finished his drink and put it down. "For better or worse we're part of an economic community, and that's a fact of life for *you*, Captain Margie Menninger. You can't sell this to me as a United States venture. You might as a cooperative deal for the Food Bloc."

"Cripes, Gus! We'd still be paying for the whole thing!"

"Maybe ninety per cent of it, yes."

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"Then why not do it all, and take it all?"

"Because," he said patiently, "I won't vote for that. So?"

Margie was silent for a moment, considering her priorities. She shrugged. "So all right," she said. "I don't mind if we include a few token gooks. Maybe two or three Canadians. A Brazilian. Maybe even a Bulgarian. In fact, there was a Bulgarian at the convention—"

She stopped herself. In mid-sentence it had occured to her that in some sense she owed that Nah whatever-it-was-ova a sort of a favor; but it had occured to her in the same instant that the Bulgarian girl had been excessively close to the very Pak she was most worried about. "No," she said, "on second thought I'm not sure I want a Bulgarian. They're too tiny a power to worry about, frankly. But maybe one or two people from the Soviets. If we send ten, and if at least six are genuine made-in-America U.S. citizens, I can see bringing along a few from the rest of the bloc."

"Um." Lenz look thoughtfully at her for a moment, moving slightly in his seat to the gentle pitching of the clamjet as it rose and fell through the night sky. "Well," he said, "we'll see." He smiled at her. "What shall we do with this night that God has given us, Margie? It's too late to think hard, and too early to go to sleep. Want to watch the stars for awhile?"

"Exactly what I want," she said, finishing the last of her drink and standing up. They made their way through the nearly empty lounge to the forward observation section and leaned against the padded rail. The clamjet was swooping gently over the rolling hills of West Virginia. Ahead of them Venus followed a crescent of a moon toward the horizon. After a while Lenz put his arm around her.

"Just checking," he said, "Old Iron-Pants."

Margie leaned against him contentedly enough. Lenz wasn't a big man. He wasn't particularly handsome, either, but he was warm and muscular, and his arm around her felt good. There were worse ways of lobbying for votes than this, she reflected, as she turned her face to his.

He came through. The full committee reported the bill out, and on a hot Georgia afternoon two or three months later Margie was called away from her company to take a high-priority phone call. She had not bathed for three days; summer field maneuvers were conducted as close to real war conditions as possible. She was sweating, filthy with both camouflage paint and Georgia clay, and she knew she smelled pretty high. Also her company was just about to take a hill that she had personally spotted and attacked, so when she got to the phone she was in no good mood. "Captain Menninger," she snarled, "and this god-damn better be important!"

Her father's voice laughed in her ear. "You tell me," he said cheerfully. "The President signed your bill ten minutes ago." Marge sank back onto the first sergeant's chair, heedless of the looks he was giving her as her elbows printed mud on his desk. "Jesus, poppa," she said, 'that's great!" She started out at the

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walls of the command trailer without seeing them, calculating whether it was more important to get back to taking that hill with the rest of the weekend soldiers or getting on the phone to start Danny Dalehouse in motion. "—what?" She had become aware that her father was still talking.

"I said there was some other news too, not quite so good. Your Pak friend."

"What about him, poppa?"

"That, uh, vacation he was going to take? He took it last week."

IV

The pilot's name was Vissarion Ilyich Kappelyushnikov, short and dark in the standard cosmonaut tradition, with a lot more Tatar in his family tree than his name would suggest. The expedition's eco-engineer was also a Soviet national, but Cossack-tall and fair-haired; his name was Pete Krivitin. The nominal commander of the expedition was an American, Alex Woodring. And they were all going at it at once. Alex was trying to arbitrate between the two Russians, helped by Harriet Santori, the translator. She wasn't really helping, but then the commander wasn't really succeeding at arbitrating. Kappelyushnikov wanted to land and get it over with. Krivitin wanted one more look at the probe reports before he would certify the landing site. Harriet wanted them all to act like adults, for heaven's sake. Woodring might have been able to sort it all out, but the difficulty was that until they landed Kappelyushnikov was the captain of the ship and Alex's authority was only potential. And it had been going on for more than an hour.

Danny Dalehouse swallowed back the desire to intervene again. He loosened the straps of his deceleration couch and peered out the porthole. There was the planet, filling the window. From less than a hundred thousand kilometers, it no longer looked "away"; it was beginning to look "down." So let us the hell *get* there, he thought testily. These people didn't seem to realize they were screwing around with his personal expedition, that none of them would have been on if he hadn't persuaded that blonde Army female to authorize it.

A voice in his ear said, "Think we'll ever get there?"

Danny drew back. The woman beside him was Sparky Cerbo, as amiable a person as there was on the expedition, but after nineteen days of sharing less than 20 cubic meters of space they were all getting edgy. The on-going spat an arm's-length away didn't make it any better.

"It doesn't look like much, does it?" Sparky went on, determinedly making the effort. Dalehouse forced himself to respond. It wasn't her fault that he was sick of the sound, the sight, and the smell of her, and besides she was right. Son of Kung didn't look like a proper planet at all. Danny knew what planets were supposed to look like. Some of them were red and bleak, like Mars. More often they were white or mottled-white, like everything else from Venus through the gas giants. This one wasn't even trying to look right.

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It wasn't so much the planet's fault as Kung's itself; as a star, it was simply incompetent. If Son of Kung had been in orbit around Earth's Sol it probably would have looked pretty fine. It had much the same atmosphere as Earth, and close enough to the same water balance and soil chemistry. What it didn't have was decently colored light from its primary. Kung glowered. It was dull red, not much brighter than Earth's moon during a total lunar eclipse. The only light that fell on Son of Kung was bloody red, and what it looked like from their orbit around it was an open wound.

It would have helped some if it had had a real terminator, but Kung's light was so dim that there was no clear division between "daylight" and "night" sides, only a blurry transition from dark to darkest. Krivitin had assured them that once landed and their eyes dark-adjusted, they would be able to see reasonably well. But from space that seemed doubtful. And for this, thought Danny, I gave up a perfectly good job at Michigan State.

The Russian-language yelling peaked to a climax and abruptly stopped. Krivitin, smiling as composedly as though the screaming match had been no more than a friendly chat about the weather, pulled himself around the lashed-down and nested machinery in the center of the main cubicle and peered in at them. "Sara, dear," he said in his perfect English, "you're wanted up front. You better come too, Daniel."

"We're going to land?" Sparky demanded.

"Most certainly not! Cappy has finally understood the necessity for another orbit."

"Hell," said Sparky, even her indomitable desire to please crumbling at last. Dalehouse shared her feelings: another orbit was close enough to another day, with nothing for him to do except to try to stay out of the way.

"Yes, I agree," said the translator, "but Alex wants you to try to tap the the Peeps' signals again."

Harriet complained, but Dalehouse stopped listening. He shucked off his straps and reached wearily for the cassettes of data he had stored away for declaration.

He plugged in, put the speaker in his ear and touched the switch. There was a slight tape hiss, and occasional scratch or click, and a distant, somber wail. Those were the sounds from the wolftrap lander. Its primary mission was to secure biological samples and test them in its built-in laboratories; but its microphones had picked up sounds that did not come from itself. He had listened to them fifty times already. After a time he shrugged, stopped the tape and put in a different cassette.

This time the sounds were louder, clearer amd with far more definition. The lander in this case had been a neutral-buoyance floater, with a small reserve of thrusting power and a locator for carbon-dioxide; like a female mosquito seeking a blood meal to fertilize its eggs, it was meant to drift until it found a trail of CO_2, then follow it until it found prey. Then it simply floated nearby as long as there were sounds for it to hear and transmit.

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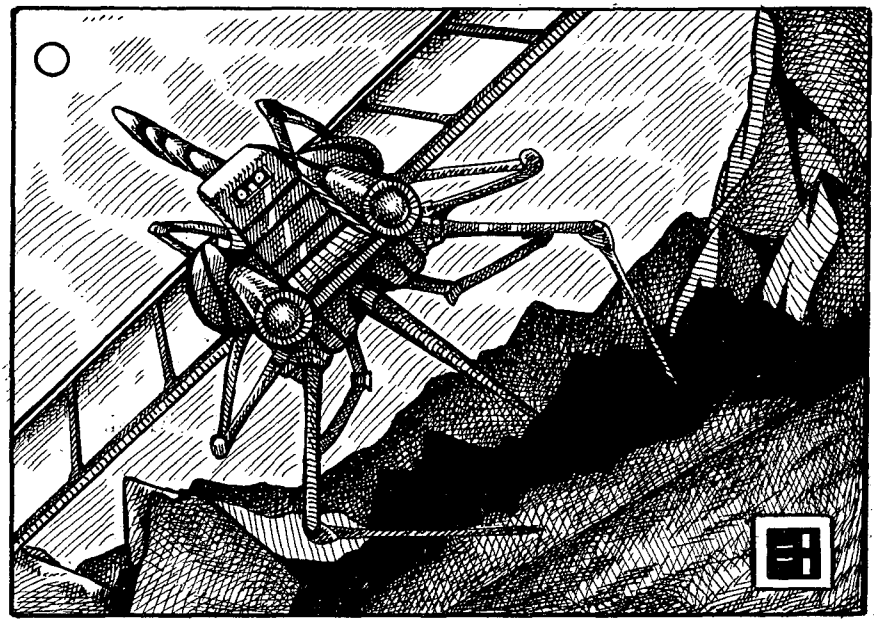

But what sounds! Sometimes they sounded like a chorus of bagpipes, sometimes like teenage boys in a crepitation contest. Dalehouse had graphed the frequencies, from well below human hearing range to higher than a bat's squeak, and identified at least twenty phonemes. These were no bird calls; this was language, he was certain.

Heat smote his exposed skin, and he turned back to the port; Kung had drifted into view, looking like a thin-skinned Hallowe'en pumpkin with the embers of Hades inside its mottled surface. He squinted and pulled a neutral-density blind over the porthole; it was not dangerous to glance at it, but there was the chance of burning out your cornea if you stared too long.

In the warmth he felt sleepy. Why not? He thought, snapping off the tape. He leaned back, closed his eyes and was just drifting off when he heard his name called. "Dalehouse! Krivitin! DiPaolo! Front and center, everybody."

He shook himself awake, wished for a cup of coffee, and pulled himself toward the workspace. The leader of the expedition, Alex Woodring, said, "You'd better all see this. The Peeps have filed another report, and Harriet's taped it for us."

Dalehouse wriggled closer for a better view of the video screen just as it blinked and lighted up. There was a plant on the screen, rust-red and fernlike, with raspberry-like fruits hanging from its fronds. "Roll the tape, Harriet," Woodring said impatiently. The pictures on the screen leaped and flickered, then stopped.

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At first Dalehouse thought the picture was another Klongan flower, possibly some desert succulent: red and yellow blobs, oozing what he supposed was some sort of sap—then it moved.

"Dear God," whispered somebody. Dalehouse felt something rise in his throat.

"What is it?"

"I think it used to be a white mouse," said the biologist.

"What *happened*?"

"That," said the biologist, grimly, but with a trace of professional satisfaction, "is what I don't know yet. The Peeps are transmitting their voice reports in code."

"They're supposed to share information!" snapped Dalehouse.

"Well, maybe they will. I assume Heir-of-Mao will have his UNESCO delegation deliver a report. And when it's released in New York, Houston will no doubt send us a copy. But not very soon, I think. The picture was clear. When you come right down to it, that's all we need to know: Klong is not as hospitable as we would like. I—" he hesitated, then went on: "I don't think it's an infectious disease. It looks more like an allergic reaction. I can't really imagine an alien micro-organism adapting that quickly to our body chemistry, anyway. I suspect we're as poisonous to them as they are to us, so, for openers, we don't eat anything, we don't drink anything but our own sealed supplies and distilled water."

"You mean we're landing anyhow?" the Canadian electronicist said incredulously.

Captain Kappelyushnikov snarled, "*Da*!" He nodded vigorously, then muttered to the translator, who said smoothly:

"He says that that is why we came here. He says we will take all precautions. He says on the next orbit, we go."

* * *

Dalehouse managed to sleep a few hours. It wasn't hard. There wasn't much for him to do. He played the strange songs from the mosquito probe a few times, but the equipment he needed to do any serious analysis had been stowed away and it made little sense to set it up again. When he woke he was given a tube of thick petroleum jelly to smear on himself—"Shuck your clothes and cover your whole body; maybe it will keep you from some kind of poison ivy or whatever that is until we get straightened out." Then he dressed again and waited. The electronicist had patched herself in to monitor any further ground transmissions, and was pointing sources on a likris map of the sunward surface of Klong.

"There seem to be *two* stations broadcasting," Dalehouse commented.

"Yeah. Must be the base camp and, I suppose, somebody off on an expedition. There's the Peep base—" she touched a dot on the purplish sea, on one side of a hundred-kilometer bay— "and there's the other station." That was across the bay. "We know that's their base; we photographed it last time around. Nothing much. They aren't really set up yet, I'd say. That signal's pulse-coded, probably

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basic science data on its way to their orbiter for tachyon transmission back home."

"What's over on the other side of the bay?"

"Nothing much. There's a sort of nest of some of the arthropods there, but *they* don't have radio." She pulled the earpiece away from her temple and handed it to Dalehouse. "Listen to that signal."

Dalehouse put the phone in his ear. The sound was a staccato two-tone beep, plaintively repeated over and over.

"Sounds sad," he said.

The woman nodded. "I think it's a distress signal," she said, frowning. "Only they don't seem to be answering it."

V

The fourth of the five beings was named Sharn-igon.

What can be said about Sharn-igon to make him come clear and real? Perhaps it can be approached in a roundabout way. Like this:

Suppose there is a kind and jolly man, the sort of person who takes children fishing, dances the polka, reads Elizabethan verse and knows why Tebaldi was the greatest Mimi who ever lived.

Is this Sharn-igon?

No. This is only an analogy. Suppose we then go on to ask you if you have ever met this man. You hesitate, riffling through the chance encounters of a life. No, you say, a finger against your nose, I don't think so, I never met anybody like that.

And suppose I then say to you: But you did! It was a week ago Thursday. He was driving the A-37 bus you took from the station to the Federal Building, and you were late for your appointment with the Tax Examiner because this man would not change a five-dollar bill.

What do you say then? I think I know. I think you say: Christ, fellow! I remember the incident well! But that was no amiable folk-dancer. That was a bus-driver!

That's how it would be with Sharn-igon. It's easy enough to imagine you meeting him (provided we don't worry about how you get there). Let's make the mind-experiment necessary to see what would happen. Suppose you are standing outside of time and space somehow, like an H.G. Wells god looking down from a cloud. You poke your finger into the infinitesimal. You touch Sharn-igon's planet, and you uncover him. You look him over.

What do you see?

I might try to describe him to you by saying that Sharn-igon was politically conservative, deeply moral, and fundamentally honest. I might try to elicit your sympathy by saying that he (like who that you know?) was screaming inside with unhealed pain.

But would you see that?

Or would you glance, and gasp, and pull back your finger in loathing, and say:

Christ, fellow! That's no person. It's an alien creature! It lives (lived? will live?) a thousand light-years away, on a planet that circles a star I have never even seen! And besides, it looks *creepy*. If I had to say what it looked like, giving it the best break I could, I would have to

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say that it looked like half of a partly squashed crab.

And, of course, you would be right. . . .

The way Sharn-igon looked to himself was something else again.

For one thing, he is not an instant invention for your eye to see. He is a person. He has relationships. He lives in a society. He moves around and through a dense web or mores, laws, customs and folkways. He wasn't like every other Krinpit (as his people called themselves), no matter how indistinguishably alike they might look to your eyes. He was Sharn-igon.

For example, although it was Ring-Greeting time, Sharn-igon hated Ring-Greeting. To him it was the loneliest and worst part of the cycle. He disliked the bustle, he resented the false and hypocritical sentiment. All the shops and brothels were busy as everyone tried to get gifts and to become pregnant, but it was an empty mockery in Sharn-igon's life, because he was alone.

If you had asked him, Sharn-igon would have told you that he had always hated Ring-Greeting, at least ever since his final moulting. (When he was a young seed just beginning to wave on his mother's grate he loved it, naturally enough. All seeds did. Ring-Greeting was for kids.) That wasn't quite true. The cycle before he and his he-wife, Cheee-pruitt, had had a very cheerful Greeting.

But Cheee-pruitt was gone. Sharn-igon signaled at his screen, almost stumbling over an inedible ghost that lay before it. There was no answer. He hesitated. Something—perhaps the ghost—seemed to be calling his name. But that was ridiculous. After a moment of indecision, he scuttled across the crowded run to—call it a bar—to chew a couple of quick ones.

Look at Sharn-igon munching on strands of hallucinogenic fern, squeezed two or three deep around the Krinpit who was kneading and dispensing the stuff. He was a fine figure of a person. He was masculinely broad—easily two meters from rim to rim—and pleasingly slim, not more than forty centimeters to the tip of his carapace. In spite of his mood, unpaired males and females of all descriptions found him attractive. He was young, healthy, sexually potent and successful in his chosen profession.

—Well, that is not strictly true, because a paradox is involved.

Sharn-igon's profession was a form of social work. The more successful he was, in terms of his own personal ego needs satisfied, the worse his society was. It was only when Krinpit were in trouble that they turned to persons like Sharn-igon. The Krinpit were socially interdependant to a degree not usually associated with a technological culture on Earth. Maybe one would find that sort of close-knit clan among the Eskimos or Bushmen, where every member of the community had to be able to rely on every other, or they would all die. For that reason Sharn-igon was happiest when he was least wanted. Ring-Greeting was bringing its usual crop of damaged egos, born of loneliness amid the holiday cheer. He was busier than he had ever been, and so less happy.

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Stand on your cloud and look down on Sharn-igon. To you he surely looks strange, and maybe quite repulsive, true. His crescent carapace is sprinkled with what look like chitinous sails. Some are a few centimeters high, some much smaller; and around them race, clicking and scraping, what look like lice. Actually, they aren't. They are not even parasites, except in the sense that a foetus is a parasite on its mother; they are the young. Sharn-igon is not the only Krinpit in the bar carrying young. Of the hundred individuals in the bar, eight or ten are in the brood-male phase. Sometimes one of the scurrying little creatures drop off, or inadvertently gets carried off on the shell of another Krinpit as they rub together. They are instantly aware of what has happened, and go wild in the attempt to get back. If they fail, they die.

Each end of Sharn-igon's shell is pleated chitin, jointed with cartilage. That part is always in motion, expanding with accordian folds, tilting, spreading like a fan. He slides along the packed dirt floor or the bodies of Krinpit under him (in the conviviality of the bar no one minds being crawled on) on a dozen double-boned legs.

After he had had three quick ones, feeling better, he left the bar and sidled down the turfy run, not hurrying, with no particular destination in mind. On each side of the run are what you might think of as rather shabby Japanese screens. They are not decorated in any way, but they are jointed and folded, and they come in all sizes. They set off the homes and commercial places, some of which are filled with scores of Krinpit, like the bar, some almost empty. The screens too are studded with the tiny sail-like projections, but otherwise they are not decorated. What you would notice at once is that they are not colored. The Krinpit do not understand color, and in the light of Kung's Star, blood-red and dusky, you would not see much color either, even if it were there.

That is how it would look to you, with your human eyes. How would it look to Krinpit eyes? Immaterial; it is a senseless question, because the Krinpit have no eyes. They have photosensitive receptors on their carapaces, but there is no lens, no retina, no mosaic of sensitive cells to analyze an image and translate it into information.

But if the scene was dark, it was also noisy.

Every one of the Krinpit was constantly booming its name—well, not its "name," in the sense that the name Franklin Roosevelt's wife was Eleanor. The name was not an arbitrary convention. It was the sound each Krinpit made. It was sound that guided them, that palped the world around them and returned information to their quite agile and competent brains. The sonar pulses they sent forth, to read the echoes, were their "names." Each was different, and every one always being produced while its owner lived. Their main auditory apparatus was the drum-tight undersurface of the belly. It possessed a vent like a dolphin's which could produce a remarkable range of vowel sounds. The "knees" of the double-boned legs could punctuate them with

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tympanous "consonants." They walked in music wherever they strolled. They could not move silently. The exact sounds they produced were controllable; in fact, they had an elaborate and sophisticated language. The sounds which became their recognition signals were probably the easiest for them, but they could produce almost any other sound in the frequency range of their hearing. In this their voices were quite like humans.

So wherever Sharn-igon went he was surrounded by that sound: "Sharn," a rising, protracted noise like a musical saw, overlaid with white hiss; "igon," a staccato double drumbeat dropping down to the tonic again. It was not just Sharn-igon. All the Krinpit were constantly making their basic name sounds, when they were not making others. It was not just marked by wind-powered sound-making machines. Nearly all of them had ratchets, or droning pipes, or bull-roarers, or circle-bowed strings clamoring out their own particular recognition signal.

So to a human eye, Sharn-igon was a lopsided crab scuttling in a clattering mass of others, in hellish red gloom with an infernal cacophony of sound coming from every direction.

Sharn-igon perceived it quite differently. He was strolling aimlessly along a well-remembered street. The street had a name; it translates rather closely as "The Great White Way."

At the intersection of the Breeder's Wallow, Sharn-igon fell into conversation with an acquaintance.

"Do you have knowledge of whereabouts of Cheee-pruitt?"

"Negative. Conjecture: statistically probable that he would be by lakeside of village."

"Why?"

"Some persons hurt or ill. Several anomalous ghosts reported."

Sharn-igon acknowledged the statements and turned toward the lakefront. He recalled that there had seemed to be a ghost near Cheee-pruitt's residence, some time before. And it was anomalous. Basically there were two kinds of ghosts. The Ghosts Above were common, and easily "visible" (because they made so much noise), but returned no echo signal to speak of to a Krinpit's sonar. They were good eating when they could be caught. The Ghosts Below were almost invisible. They seldom made visible sounds, and returned not much echo; they were mostly observed when their underground digging damaged a Krinpit structure or farm. They too were good eating, and were systematically hunted for that purpose, when the Krinpit were lucky enough to locate a nest of young.

But what was an anomalous ghost?

Sharn-igon scuttled through the Breeders' Wallow to the Place of Fish Vendors, and along the lakefront to the bright commotion at the Raft Mooring. There was something almost invisible bobbing in the gentle roll of the bay. The Krinpit used metal only very sparingly, and Sharn-igon recognized the brightness of it; but the bright metal seemed to float over something so soft and immaterial that it returned

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no real reflection to his sounding. The bright part, though, not only reflected Sharn-igon's sounds almost blindingly, it generated sound of its own: a faint high steady whine, an irregular dry-sand rustle. Sharn-igon could not identify the sounds; but then, he had never seen a TV camera or a radio transponder.

He stopped one of the Krinpit moving irritably away from the group and asked what was happening.

"Some Krinpit attempted to eat the ghost. They are damaged."

"Did the ghost harm them?"

"Negative. After eating, they became damaged. One ghost is still there. Advise against eating."

Sharn-igon touched mandibles and moved on, concerned about Cheee-pruitt. He didn't hear him anywhere in the crowd, but the din was blinding. At least two hundred Krinpit were scratching and sliding over each other's carapaces, milling around the bloody mass that had been one of the "ghosts." Sharn-igon halted and sounded the area, irresolutely.

From behind him he thought he heard his own name, badly spoken but recognizable: *Sharn-igon*. When he turned, his highly directional sound sense identified the source. It was the ghost. The one that had seemed to speak his name. Sharn-igon approached it cautiously; he did not like its smell, he didn't like its muffled, shadowy sound. But it was a curiosity. First his own name: Sharn-igon. And in between—what? Another name? It was certainly not a Krinpit name, but the ghost kept repeating it. It sounded like OCK med dool LAH.

* * *

On the other shore of the Bay of the Cultural Revolution, fifty kilometers away, Feng Hua-tse rinsed the honey buckets in the purplish waters and carried them back toward the bubble cluster that was the People's Bloc headquarters. From the shore you couldn't see the landing craft itself at all. The extruded bubbles surrounded and hid it. Through the translucent walls of the nearest of them (they could have been made opaque, but the group decision had been that energy conservation was more important than privacy) he could see the vague shadows of the two women detailed as sickbay orderlies. They had not been given the job because they were women. They had got the job because they should have been in bed themselves. Barely able to stagger, they could more or less take care of themselves and the two bed cases. And there was no one to spare to do it for them.

Feng put the clean buckets inside the sickbay bubble, resenting the waste of the precious nightsoil. But it was his own decision that the wastes from the casualties should be dumped in the bay rather than used to fertilize their tiny plot of garden. Until they were sure what had killed one member of the expedition and put four more on the sick list—nearly half their effectives wiped out at one stroke!—Feng would not risk contamination. It was a pity that their biologist was the sickest of the survivors; his wisdom was needed. But Feng had been a barefoot biologist himself in his youth, and he kept up the experi-

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ments with the animals, the tachtran reports back to Peking and the four-times-daily examinations of the sick.

He paused in the radio room. The video screen that monitored the small party which had crossed the bay was still showing the same monotonous scene. Apparently the camera had been left on the raft, and apparently the raft had drifted in the slow, vagrant currents of the bay, so that the camera showed only an occasional thin slice of shoreline, a quarter of a kilometer away. Once in a while you could see one of the arthropods scuttling along, and now and again a glimpse of their low, flimsy buildings. But he had not yet seen either Ahmed Dulla or the Costa Rican who had gone with him.

Outside the bubble for the communications equipment, the two West Indians were desultorily scooping dirt into woven baskets. Feng spoke sharply to them and achieved a momentary acceleration of pace. They were sick, too, but it was not yet clear whether it was the same sickness as the others. They, he thought bitterly, should feel at home here. The heat and the humidity were jungle-like. What was worst was the lighting, always the same dusky red, never bright enough to see clearly, never dusk. Feng had had a headache since they arrived, and it was his private opinion it was only from eyestrain. Feng, at least had not eaten any Klongan food. In this he was luckier, or wiser, than the four in the sickbay and the one who had died, not to mention the dozen rats and guinea pigs they fed with the stuff experimentally. Feng swore. Why had he let that long-nosed hillman, Dulla, talk him into splitting their forces? To be sure, it had happened before the five became violently ill. Even so, it had been a mistake. When he got back to Shensi, Feng admitted to himself, there would be a long day of self-criticism for himself.

If he got back.

He picked up two baskets of dirt in his shoulder yoke and carried them with him as he went to inspect the dam. That was his greatest hope. When it was completed, they would have electricity to spare. Electricity to power the ultraviolet lamps, still stored in the landing craft's hold, that would turn the feeble, pale seedlings into sturdy crops of food. There was nothing wrong with this soil! No matter how many got sick, even if they died, it was not the soil's fault; Feng had rubbed it between finger and thumb, sniffed it, turned a spadeful over and gazed wonderingly at the crawling things that inhabited it. They were strange, but they meant the soil was fertile. What it did not have was proper sunlight. That they would have to make, as soon as the dam was built; and then, Feng swore, they would produce crops that any collective in Shensi Province would envy.

It was raining as he started back, slow, fat, warm drops that ran down Feng's back under his cotton jacket. Another good thing: plenty of water. Not only was it good for the plants, but it kept the spores down, and Feng was highly suspicious of them as the source of the sickness. Even through the clouds

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he could feel the warmth of Kung Fu-tze. It was not visible, but it gave the clouds the angry, ruddy look of sky over a distant great city. It would stay that way until the air mass that carried the clouds moved away; then there would be that distant hot coal, and the purple-black sky with its stars.

Feng took the forest path back to the headquarters, checking the traps. One held two multilegged creatures like land-going lobsters, one dead, the other eating it. Feng dumped them both and did not reset the trap. There was no point in it. They were too short-handed to bother with more animal specimens than they had already. Three of the traps were sprung but empty, and one was simply missing. Feng muttered to himself irritably. There was a lot they didn't know about the fauna of this fern forest. For one thing, what had stolen the trap? Most of the creatures they had seen were arthropods, buglike or crustacean-like, none of them bigger than a man's hand. Bigger ones existed. The sentiments in the settlement across the bay were proof of that; they were the size of a man. But the wild ones, if they existed, stayed out of sight. And there was something that lived in the tall, woody ferns. One could hear them, even catch a glimpse of them from time to time, but no one in the expedition had yet caught or even photographed one. It stood to reason that if there were small creatures there would be bigger ones to eat them, but where were they? And what would they look like? Wolf teeth, cat talons, crab claws?—Feng abandoned that line of thought: it was not reassuring. To be sure, the local fauna would no doubt find humans as indigestible as the humans had found the local fauna.

But they might not realize that in time.

It began to look as though humans would not find anything at all to eat on Klong. The biologist had been reduced to taking samples of micro-organisms from each member of the party and culturing them on plates of agar. It was no longer possible to use laboratory animals. They had all died. And one by one he tried every promising looking bit of plant or animal they brought him, dropping a broth of it onto the agar, and one by one each of them destroyed the darkening circle of growing bacteria. They were perfect antibiotics. Except for one thing: they would have killed the patient more quickly than any disease.

Feng became aware that his name was being called.

He turned away from the place where the last trap had been, trotting back toward the settlement. As he approached the beach and the fronds thinned, he saw one of the walking casualties waving in excitement.

Feng trotted back, arriving out of breath. "What, what?" he grumbled.

"A radio message from the long nose! It is a distress signal, Hua-tse."

"Tchah! What did he say?"

"He said nothing, Hua-tse. It is the automatic distress call. I tried to raise him but there was no response."

"Of course," snarled Feng, gripping his hands together in anger.

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Another thing to admit to before the commune. Two members of the party endangered, perhaps lost, because he had foolishly permitted the division of their forces. Two irreplaceable persons—a hillman and a Hispanic, to be sure; nevertheless, persons. Their absence would be serious. And not just the persons. One of their three television cameras. The radio transponder. The precious plastic that had gone into making the skin of the boat. There was just so much of that. They had squandered a great deal on the bubbles to house the sick, the equipment, all their sparse possessions. That was foolishness, too; the fern forest was a limitless supply of woody stems for frames, fronds for ceilings and walls. In this drenched warmth they needed no more than that, but he had weakly permitted the blowing of bubble huts instead of using what nature provided.

Could they build another boat? It was by no means sure that there was plastic enough even for the hull and the sails; and when it was gone, where would they get more? Who could he send? Of their original eleven, one was dead, two were missing and four were sick. Was it not even more foolish to further divide their forces, to attempt to repair the damage the first foolishness had cost? And what could they do if they did in fact build another boat and sail across the bay? That which had happened to the hillman and the Hispanic could just as well happen to whoever went after them. They had very little in the way of weapons, no more to spare than Dulla and the other man had taken with them in the first place, and little enough good that had done them—

"Are we going, Hua-tse?"

His attention was jarred back. What?"

"Are we going to try to help our comrades?"

Feng gripped his hands tighter. "With what?" he demanded.

VI

On a planet that has no night the days are endless, Danny Dalehouse reflected, a meter down into the Klongan soil and at least that much more to go. His muscles told him he had been digging this latrine for at least eight hours. The discouragingly tiny spoil heap beside him contradicted it, and the ruddy glow that backlighted the clouds overhead offered no help. Latrine digging was not what he had signed on for. But it was something that had to be done, and he was clearly the most superfluous member of the party in line to do it; only why did it have to take so long?

They had been on the planet only three days (not that there were any days, but the old habits died hard), and already the pleasure was wearing thin. The parts that weren't actively unpleasant, like digging latrines, were a bore. The parts that weren't already boring were scary, like the madly violent thunderstorm that had blown away their first tent only hours after landing, or irritatingly uncomfortable, like the itchy rashes they had all developed and the stomach troubles that had made the latrines so vital. And to make it worse, they seemed to have com-

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pany. Kappelyushnikov had come swearing in Russian to report that a third tachtran vessel had climbed down its charge state to orbit Klong. Greasies, no doubt. That meant everybody in the world was now represented on Klong. What price the solitary pioneer?

His spade struck air.

Danny lost his balance, spun and came down in a foetal crouch into the pit, his face almost into the hole that had unexpectedly opened up. From it came a cool, musty smell. It made him think of unopened cellars and the cages of pet mice, and he heard quick, furtive movements.

Snakes? He rejected the thought as soon as he formed it. That was an earthly fear, not appropriate on Klong. But whatever it was could easily be even more deadly than a nest of rattlers. He leaped with prudent speed out of the trench and yelled, "Morrissey!"

The biologist was only a few meters away, sealing plant samples pickled in preservative into plastic baggies. "What's the matter?"

"I hit a hole. Maybe a tunnel. You want to take a look?"

Morrissey looked down at the purplish seed pod in his forceps and back at Dalehouse's trench, torn. Then he said, "Sure, only I have to finish stowing these away first. Don't dig any more till I finish."

That was welcome. Dalehouse accepted the order gratefully. He was getting used to taking orders. Even as a latrine digger he was subject to instant draft, whenever some presently more valuable member of the expedition needed another pair of hands: Harriet to set up her radio, Morrissey to heat-seal his baggies, helping Sparky Cerbo locate the canned tomatoes and the kitchen knives that had vanished during the thunderstorm—anyone. Twice already he had had to empty the landing vehicle's chemical toilet into a shallow pit and scrape the soil of Klong over it, because the rest of the crew couldn't wait for him to finish the job they were preventing him from finishing.

It was a drag. But he was on Son of Kung! He could smell the strange Klongan smells—cinnamon, and mold, and cut vegetation and something that was a little like Mom's Apple Pie, but none of them really any of those things. He could see the Klongan landscape—he could see quite a lot of it, a shovelful at a time.

It was what he had expected, in an expedition of specialists. Dalehouse was not a cook, not a farmer, not a doctor, not a radio surveyor. He was not any of the hypertrophied skills that all the others possessed. He was the expedition's only generalist, and would stay that way until they made contact with the local scientists and he could start with the communications skills he was advertised to have. Until then he was stoop labor.

The Russian pilot, Kappelyushnikov, was yelling his name. "You, Danny, you come have drink. Put back sweat!"

"Why not?" Danny was pleased to notice that cappy was holding aloft a glass containing a centimeter of water, grinning broadly. He had finally got the still to working. Dalehouse swallowed the few drops and wiped his lips appreciately, then his slippery brow. Kap-

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pelyushnikov was right enough about that. In the dank, humid air they were both covered with sweat. The still was powered with a small oil-spray flame which made it like burning hundred-dollar bills to operate. Later it would be moved to the lakeshore and driven by solar power, but right now they needed water they could drink. "Very good, is it?" Kappelyushnikov demanded. "You don't feel faint, like it's some poison? Okay. Then we go bring a drink to Gasha."

The translator had given herself command of the setting-up phase of the camp and no one had resisted; she was spending hours over her radio, trying to make sense of the communications, but she claimed the other half of her mind was able to keep track of everyone's duty assignments. She might have been right, Dalehouse thought. She was the least agreeable person on the expedition, and no one particularly wanted to disagree with her. She was also close to the least physically attractive, with stringy black hair and an expression of permanent disappointment. But she was grudgingly grateful for the water. "Thank you for getting the still going. And the latrine, of course, Danny. Now if the two of you—"

"I'm not finished," Danny corrected. "Jim wants to check out a hole first. Is there anything new on the radio?"

Harriet smiled with closed lips. "We have a message from the Peeps."

"About that guy that's stuck?"

"Oh, no. Take a look." She handed over a facsimile film that said:

> The People's Republics extend the hand of friendship to the second expedition to arrive on Child of Kung. Through peaceful cooperation we will achieve a glorious triumph for all mankind. We invite you to join us for the celebration of the fifteen hundredth anniversary of the writings of Confucius, after whom our star was named.

Dalehouse was perplexed. "Isn't that some kind of a winter holiday?"

"You are very informed today, Dalehouse. It is in December. Our instructor called it the Confucian answer to Chanukkah, which is of course the Jewish answer to Christmas."

He frowned, trying to remember—already, it was becoming hard. "But this isn't even October yet."

"You are very swift indeed, Danny. So translate that, won't you?" requested the translator.

"I don't know. Are they saying something like, don't bother us for a couple of months."

"Is more like to drop dead," the pilot put in.

"I don't think so. They aren't being unfriendly," Harriet said, recapturing the fax and squinting at it. "Notice that they referred to Kung Fu-tze by the latinized form of the name. That's a pretty courteous thing for them to do. Still—" She frowned. At her best Harriet's eyes were always faintly popped, like a rabbit's, because of the heavy contacts she wore. Now her lips were pursed like a rabbit's, too. "On the other hand, they were careful to

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point out we're the *second* expedition."

"Meaning they're the first. But what's the difference? They can't make territorial claims because they got here ahead of us, that's all spelled out in the U.N. accords. Nobody get to claim any more than a circle fifty kilometers around a self-sustaining base."

"But they're pointing out that they could have."

Cappy was bored with the protocol. "Any love-letters from the Oilies, Gasha?"

"Just a a received-and-acknowledged. And now, that latrine—"

"In a minute, Harriet. What about the Pak that's stranded?"

"He's still stranded. You want to hear the latest tapes?" She didn't wait for an answer, she knew what it would be. She plugged in a coil of tape and played it for them. It was the Peep's automatic distress signal; every thirty seconds a coded SOS, followed by a five-second beep for homing. Between signals the microphone stayed open, transmitting whatever sounds were coming in.

"I've cut out most of the deadwood. Here's the man's voice."

Neither Dalehouse nor Kappelyushnikov included Urdu among their skills. "What is he say?" asked the pilot.

"Just asking for help. But he's not in good shape. Most of the time he doesn't talk at all, and we get this stuff."

What came out of the tape player was a little like an impossibly huge cricket's chirp and quite a lot like a Chinese New Year festival in which Australian aborigines were playing their native instruments.

"What the hell is that?" Danny demanded.

"That," she said smugly, "is also language. I've been working on it, and I've sorted out a few key concepts. They are in some sort of trouble, I'm not sure what."

"Not as much as Pak's," grunted Kappelyushnikov. "Come, Danny, is time we go to work."

"Yes, that latrine is—"

"Not on latrine! Other things in life than shit, Gasha."

She paused, glowering at him. Kappelyushnikov was almost as dispensible as Danny Dalehouse. Maybe more so. After the expedition was well established, Dalehouse's skills would come into play, or so they all hoped, in making contact with sentient life. The pilot's main skill was piloting. A spacecraft by choice. If pressed, a clamjet, a racing vessel or a canoe. None of those existed on Klong.

But what he had was resourcefulness. "Gasha, dear," he coaxed, "is not possible. Your Morrissey still has his micetraps in the trench. And besides, now we have water, I have to make *sauerstoff*."

"Hydrogen," Harriet corrected automatically. "Hydrogen? What in the world do you want with hydrogen?"

"So I will have a job, dear Gasha. To fly."

"You're going to fly with hydrogen?"

"You understand me, Gasha," the Russian beamed. He pointed. "Like them."

Danny glanced up, then ran for the tent and the one remaining decent pair of binoculars—two pairs

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of them, too, had turned up missing after the thunderstorm.

There they were, the wind-blown flock of balloonists, high and near the clouds. They were at least two kilometers away, too far to hear the sounds of their song, but in the glasses Dalehouse could see them clearly enough. In the purplish sky they stood out in their bright greens and yellows. It was true, Dalehouse verified. Some of them were self-luminous, like fireflies! Traceries of veins stood out over the great five-meter gas bag of the largest and nearest of them, flickering with racing sparks of bioluminescence.

"Damn," he snarled. "What are you saying, Cappy? Do you think you can fly up there?"

"With greatest of ease, Danny," the pilot said solemnly. "Is only a matter of making bubbles and putting *sauerstoff* in them. Then we fly."

"You've got a deal," said Dalehouse firmly. "Tell me what to do and I'll do it. I'll—wait a minute! What's that?"

The balloon swarm was scattering, and behind them, coming through the place they were vacating, was something else, something that beat with a regular metric flash of light.

The sound reached him, then. "It's a helicopter!" he cried in astonishment.

* * *

The chopper pilot was short, dark and Irish. Not only Irish, but repatriated to the U.K. from eleven years in Houston, Texas. He and Morrissey hit it off immediately. "Remember Bismarck's?" "Ever been to La Carafe?" "Been there? I lived there!" And when they were all gathered he said:

"Glad to meet you all. Name's Terry Boyne, and I bring you official greetings from our expedition, that's the Organization of Fuel Exporting Nations, to yours, that's you. Nice place you've got here," he went on appreciatively, glancing around. "We're down toward the heat pole—ask my opinion, you folks picked a better spot. Where we are it's wind you wouldn't believe and scorching hot besides, if you please."

"So why'd you pick it?" asked Morrissey.

"Oh," said Boyne, "we do what our masters tell us. Isn't it about the same with you? And what they told me to do today was to come over and make a good-neighbor call."

Harriet, of course, stepped right in. "On behalf of the Food-exporting States we accept your greetings and in return—"

"Please to stow, Harriet?" rumbled Kappelyushnikov. "But we are not only other colony on Klong, Terry Boyne."

"Or even the first, as the Peeps have reminded us," Danny added. "Have you been to see them?"

Boyne coughed. "Well, actually that's more or less what it's about, if you see what I mean. Have you people been monitoring their broadcasts?"

"Sure we have. Yours too."

"Right, then you've heard their distress signals. Poor sod stuck with those Krinpit beasts. The Peeps don't respond. We offered to help out, and they as much as told us to fuck off." Morrissey glanced at

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Harriet before he said, "We've had much the same experience, Terry. They indicated we weren't welcome in their part of the world. Of course, they have no right to take that kind of a stand—"

"—but you don't want to start any bloc-to-bloc trouble," finished Boyne, nodding. "Well, for humanitarian reasons—" He choked, and took a great swig of the drink Morrissey had handed him before going on. "Hell, let's be frank. For curiosity's sake, and just to see what's going on over there—but also for humanitatian reasons—we want to go and fish they guy out of there. The Peeps obviously can't. We suppose the reason they shut you and us out is that they don't want us to see how bad off they are. You folks can't—" He hesitated delicately. "Well, obviously it would be easier for us to go in with a chopper than for you to send an expedition overland. We're willing to do that. But not alone, if you see what I mean."

"I think I do," Harriet sniffed. "You want somebody to share the blame."

"We want to make it a clearly interbloc errand of mercy," Boyne corrected. "So I'm all set to go over there and snatch him out, this minute. But I'd like one of you to go along."

Eight out of the ten members of the expedition were speaking at once then, with Kappelyushnikov's shouted, "I go!" drowning out the rest. Harriet glared around at her crew and then said petulantly:

"Go then, if you want to, although we're so shorthanded here—"

Danny Dalehouse didn't wait for her to finish. "That's right, Harriet! And that's why it ought to be me. I can be spared, and besides—"

"No! I, *I* can be spared, Danny! And I am pilot—"

"Sorry, Cappy," said Danny confidently. "We already have a pilot—Mr. Boyne, there—and besides you have to make your *sauerstoff* so you can take me flying when I come back. And, two, making contact with alien sentients is my basic job, isn't it? And—" he didn't wait for an answer—"besides, I think I know the guy that's stuck there. Ahmed Dulla. We were both hassled by the cops in Bulgaria a couple of months ago."

* * *

Wook. Wook. Wook. changed to *whickwhickwhickwhick* as the pilot increased the pitch of the rotors and the copter rocked off the ground and headed for a cloud. Danny clung to the seat, marveling at the profligacy with which the Fuel Bloc spent its treasure—four metric tons of helicopter alone, tachyon-transported from Earth orbit at what cost in resources he could not guess.

"You don't get airsick, do you? shouted Boyne over the noise of the blades. Danny shook his head, and the pilot grinned and deflected the blade edges so that the chopper leaned toward, and began to move after, a bank of cumulus. To Danny's disappointment, the flock of balloonists was out of sight, but there were still small and large crea-

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tures in the air, keeping their distance. Dalehouse couldn't see them very clearly, and suspected they wanted it that way, staying at the limits of vision and disappearing into cloud as the copter came close. But below! That was laid out for him to enjoy as the chopper bounced along, less than fifty meters over the tallest growth. Groves of trees like bamboo, clusters of thirty-meter ferns, tangles of things like mangroves, twenty or more trunks uniting to form a single cat's-cradle tangle of vegetation. He could see small things scuttling and leaping to hide as they twisted overhead, colors of all sorts. The unwinking red glower of the dwarf star toned down rock and water, but the brightest colors were not reflections. They were foxfire glow and lightning-bug tail, the lights of the plants themselves.

Of course Dalehouse had studied the maps of Klong, orbital photos supplemented by side-scatter radar. But this was different, seeing the landscape as they soared above it. Back along the shore was their own camp, on a narrow neck of land that locked off a bay from the wider ocean, or lake, a kilometer or two away. There was the lake (or ocean) itself, curving around like a bitten-into watermelon slice, and, in the light from Kung, almost the same color. Down the shore of it was the Peeps' encampment. Past that, off toward the part of Klong that lay just under the star, where the land was dryer and the temperatures even higher, was the Greasies' camp. Both of those were out of sight, of course. The copter swung out across the water. Boyne pointed, and Dalehouse nodded; he could see the place where they were going just taking form through the gloomy haze, on the far shore.

Boyne had not been entirely frank, Dalehouse discovered. He had not mentioned that this was not his first flight to the Krinpit community. There had been at least two overflights before that, because there were photos of the layout. Boyne pulled a sheaf of them out of an elastic pocket in the door of the copter, sorted through them and passed one over to Danny. "There, by the water's edge!" he bawled. His finger jabbed at a curled-up figure a few meters from the water's edge. Drawn up nearby was a plastic coracle, and there were sheds and more obscure structures all around. There were also some very unpleasant looking creatures like square-ended crabs: Krinpit. Some of them were suspiciously close to the huddled figure.

"Is he still alive?" Danny shouted.

"Don't know. He was a day or two ago. He's probably okay for water, but he must be getting damned hungry by now. And probably sick."

From the air the Krinpit village looked like a stockyard, most of the structures comprising only unroofed walls, like cattle pens. The creatures were all around, Danny saw, moving astonishingly quickly, at least when matched against his image of Earthside crustaceans. And they were clearly aware the chopper was approaching. Some raised up to point their blind faces toward it, and an ominous number seemed to be converging on the waterside.

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"Creepy looking things, ain't they?" Boyne shouted.

"Listen," said Danny, "how are we going to get Dulla away from them? They don't just look creepy. They look mean."

"Yeah." Boyne rolled down his window and leaned out, circling the helicopter around. He shook his head, then pointed. "That your buddy?"

The figure had moved since the photograph was taken, was no longer in the shelter of one of the sheds but a few meters away and lying outstretched, face down. Dulla didn't look particularly alive, but he wasn't clearly dead, either.

Boyne frowned thoughtfully, then turned to Dalehouse. "Open that case between your feet there, will you, and hand me a couple of those things."

The "things" were metal cylinders with a wire loop at the end. Boyne took half a dozen, pulled the loops and tossed them carefully toward the Krinpits. As they struck, billowing yellow clouds of smoke came out of them, forming a dense cloud. The Krinpit staggered out of the smoke as though disoriented.

"Just tear gas," Boyne grinned. "They hate it." He stared down. Nearly all the creatures that had been converging around the prone man were fleeing now. . . all but one.

That one was obviously in distress, but it did not leave the vicinity of the prone human being. It seemed to be in pain. It moved dartingly back and forth as though torn between conflicting imperatives: to flee; to stay; perhaps even to fight. "What are we going to do about that son of a bitch?" Boyne wondered out loud, hovering over the scene. But then the creature moved painfully away and Boyne made his decision. He dropped to the ground between the Krinpit and the unconscious Pakistani. "Grab 'im, Danny!" he yelled.

Danny flung open his door and jumped out. He scooped up the Pakistani with more difficulty than he had expected. Dulla did not weigh much more than fifty kilos here, but he was boneless as rubber, completely out of it. Danny got him under the arms and more dragged than carried him into the helicopter, while Boyne swore worriedly. The rotors spun and they started to lift off, and there was a rushing, clattering scramble from the other side. Two hundred kilograms of adult Krinpit launched itself onto the side-pallette. Boyne gibbered in rage and jockeyed the controls. The chopper staggered and seemed about to turn on its side; but he got it straight and it began to pull up and away.

"What are you going to do, Boyne?" yelled Danny, trying to pull Dulla's legs inside so he could close the door. "You can't just leave that thing there!"

"Hell I can't!" Boyne stared worriedly at the stiff-jointed legs that were trying to scrape through the plastic to get at him, then turned the copter up and over the water. "I've always wanted a pet. Let's see if I can get this bugger home!"

* * *

By the time he got back to his own camp, full of wonder and wor-

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ries, Dalehouse was physically exhausted. He made a quick report to the rest of the expedition and then fell into a dreamless sleep.

"Night" was an arbitrary concept on Klong. When he woke the sky was the same as it always was, clouds and the dull red cinder of Kung hanging off-center above.

It was back to work as usual. Kappelyushnikov, or somebody, had done some digging for him. He had less than an hour's work, mostly neatening up the edges. He welcomed it, because he had more than an hour's pondering to do.

After rescuing the Pakistani, Boyne had laid a beeline course for his own home base. He had not even asked if Dulla were alive; his attention was taken up to saturation by the hideous and very active creature only centimeters from his left ear, and by the demands of piloting. Warned by radio, the Greasies had nets prepared. They had the Krinpit lashed and stowed before the beast knew what was happening. Then a quick meal while Dulla got some sort of emergency medical treatment, mostly cleaning him up and flowing a little glucose into his bloodstream. Then over the barren, hot ground to the Peeps' camp, where they left the sick man, accepted some haughty thanks from the Chinese in charge of the place and took Dalehouse home.

All in all, he had been gone five or six hours. And every second filled with some new input to worry over in his mind.

He really begrudged them the Krinpit. There was no doubt the creature was intelligent. If the buildings hadn't proved that by themselves, its methodical attempt to gouge its way into the helicopter, and its patient acceptance of failure when the plastic proved too tough, spoke of thought. It had struggled only briefly when the Greasies threw the nets over it, then allowed itself to be hauled into a steel barred cage. Only after the cage door had slammed behind it did it systematically cut through the netting to free its limbs. Dalehouse had spent all the moments he could spare just watching it, and trying to make sense of its sounds. If only he had taken the brain-split at some point in his studies! He knew that Harriet or even that Bulgarian girl, Ana, could have reasoned out some sort of linguistic pattern, but it was only noise to him.

Then there was the wonder of the Greasy camp itself. Steel bars! A helicopter! Bunk legs, with metal springs! He could not begin to imagine what profligate burning of irreplaceable fuel had made it possible for them to hurl all that stuff at superflight speed to an orbit around Kung, and then to lower it safely to the surface of the planet. They even had air-conditioning! True, they needed it; the surface temperature must have been well over forty, so near to the heat pole. But no one forced them to settle where they would need the permanent drain of air conditioners to survive.

And by contrast, the Peeps. That was pathetic. Old What'sy had put the best face possible on it, but it was clear that the return of Dulla meant to him principally another casualty to try to take care of, with hardly anybody healthy enough to

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do the nursing. Much less do anything else. He had proudly given the visitors to understand that another expedition was on the way—"nearly as big as our own." But how big was that?

Jim Morrissey interrupted his train of thought. The biologist had been out of the camp and had not heard the report; now he wanted it all over again, first hand. Dalehouse obliged, and then asked, "Did you catch anything in your micetraps?"

"Huh? Oh." Obviously that was long in Morrissey's past by now. "No. I ran a wire-tethered probe down the tunnel, but it kept hitting blind alleys. They're pretty smart, whoever they are. As soon as you broke into their tunnel they closed it off."

"So you don't have any animals to send back to Earth?"

"No animals? Never say it, never think it, Danny! I've got a whole menagerie. Crabrats and bugs, creepers and flyers. God knows what they all are. I think the crabrats are probably related to the Krinpit, but you can't really trace relationships until you do paleontology and, Christ, I haven't even made a beginning on the taxonomy yet. And plants— Well, anyway, you might as well call them plants. They don't have stomatas or mesophyll cells. Would you believe that?"

"Sure I would, Jim."

"Where the photosynthetic process happens I don't know," Jim went on, marveling, "but it's the same good old thing. Starch production driven by sunlight. Or what passes for sunlight. Six Cee Oh Two plus Six Aitch Two Oh still yields Cee-Six Aitch-Twelve Oh-Six and some spare oxygen, on Earth as it is in the heavens. Or the other way around."

"That's starch?" Dalehouse guessed.

"You bet. But don't eat any of it. And keep putting that jelly on your skin every time it rubs off. There're congeners in all that stuff that will do you in."

"Sure." Dalehouse's attention was wandering, and he hardly listened as Morrissey catalogued the vegetation he had so far identified on Klong: something like grasses that covered the plains, succulents like bamboo, with hollow stems that would make fine structural materials. Forests of plants that looked like ferns, but were fruiting and with woody stems. Some of them grew together from many trunks, like mangroves; others towered in solitary splendor, like redwoods. There were veins like grapes, spreading by transporting their hard-shelled seeds through the digestive tracts of animals. Some of them were luminous. Some were meat-eating, like the Venus fly-trap. Some—

"That starch," Dalehouse interrupted, pursuing his train of thought. "Can't we eat it? I mean, sort of cook the poison out of it, like tapioca?"

"Danny, stick to what you know."

"No, really," Dalehouse persisted. "We're shipping a lot of mass in the form of food. Couldn't we?"

"No. Well, maybe. In a sense. It takes only a little bit of their proteins to kick off a reaction I can't

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handle, so don't experiment. Remember the Peeps' white mice."

"If they're plants, why aren't they green?"

"Well, they are, kind of. In this light they look purple because Kung's so red. But if you shine a flashlight on them they're a kind of greenish yellow. But, you know," he went on earnestly, "it's not the usual chlorophyll. Not even a porphyrin derivative. They do seem to use a magnesium ion—"

"I better get this finished up," said Danny, patting the biologist on the shoulder.

It was almost done. He lugged the chemical toilet from the lander and balanced it over the slit trench, and then reported to Harriet. "All done, first-class American crapper ready for use."

She came over to inspect and then pursed her tiny lips. "Dalehouse, do you think we're animals? Can't you at least put a tent over it?"

"Oh, you want the deluxe model."

"And before it rains again, would you mind? Look at those clouds. Damn it, Danny, why do I have to tell everybody what to do around here?"

* * *

He got the tent up. But the storm, when it came, was a rouser. Lightning scored the entire sky, cloud to ground and air to air. Kung was completely obscured, not even a dull glow to mark where it hung in the sky, and the only light was the lightning itself. The first casualty was the power system. The second was Danny's outhouse tent, torn flying away by the 80-kilometer wind gusts. By the time it was over they were drenched and miserable, and all of them were busy trying to put the camp together again. East Lansing had had no storms like Klong's, and Danny viewed with dismal foreboding the next few years on this treacherous planet. When he realized he had been more than twenty hours without sleep he tumbled into bed and dreamed of a warm morning in Bulgaria with a pretty blonde-haired woman.

When he woke, Jim Morrissey was poking him. "Out. I get the bed next."

It wasn't really even a bed, just a sleeping bag on an air mattress, but at least it was warm and dry. Dalehouse reluctantly yielded it to the biologist. "So the camp survived?"

"More or less. Don't go near Harriet, though. One of her radios is missing, and she thinks we're all to blame." As he climbed into the bed and stretched his legs down to the warm interior he said, "Cappy wants to show you something."

Danny didn't rush to see the pilot; odds were, he considered, that it was just some other stoop-labor job that needed doing. It could wait until he had something to eat, although, he reflected, chewing doggedly through a guaranteed full daily requirement of essential vitamins and minerals (it looked like a dog biscuit), eating wasn't a hell of a lot more fun than digging latrines.

But that wasn't what Kappelyushnikov had in mind. "Is no more manual labor for you and me

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for a while, Danny," he grinned. "Have now been honored by appointment as chief meteorologist. Must make more *sauerstoff* to check winds, and you help."

"Harriet was real shook up by the storm," Dalehouse guessed.

"Gasha? Yes, that is what she wants, better weather forecasting. But what I want is exotic travel to faraway places! You will see."

Kappelyushnikov's still had been converted to solar power, a trough of brackish water from the lake running between aluminum reflecting V's, and the vapor trapped on a plastic sheet overhead. The drops slipped down into a tank, and part of the fresh water was being electrolyzed into hydrogen and oxygen. From the hydrogen collector, a seamless plastic balloon, a small compressor whirred at regular intervals to pump the gas into a heavy metal cylinder.

Kappelyushnikov checked the pressure gauge and nodded gravely. "Is plenty. Now you go borrow theodolite from head boss, Gasha. Do not take no for an answer; and then I will show you something that will truly amaze you."

Fortunately for Dalehouse, Harriet was somewhere else when he went for the theodolite, a small sighting telescope that looked like a surveyor's transit. By the time he got back with it Kappelyushnikov had filled a plastic balloon with hydrogen and was expertly balancing its lift against the weight of a silver ruble. "My good luck piece," he said dreamily. "Yes, fine. You have pencil?"

"What's a pencil? I have a ballpoint."

"Don't make fun of old-fashioned Soviet values," Kappelyushnikov said severely. "When I let go of balloon, you keep eye on watch. Every twenty seconds you tell me, I call off readings, you write down. You understand? Okay, let go."

The little balloon did not leap out of Dalehouse's fingers, it only drifted upward, bobbing gently as vagrant zephyrs caught it. In the still after the storm there was no strongly prevailing wind that Dalehouse could feel, but he could see the balloon move erratically. At each time-hack Kappelyushnikov read off right ascension and declination bearings. After the seventh reading he began to swear, and after the ninth he straightened up, scowling. "Is no good! Lousy Kungson light, I cannot see. Next time we will tie on candle."

"Fine, but would you mind telling me what we're doing?

"Measuring winds aloft, dear Danny! See how balloon curved around, started back way it came? Winds at different levels blow various individual different directions. Balloons follows. We follow balloon. Now we reduce readings, and soon I will truly astonish you with more than you wish to know about Klongan wind patterns."

Dalehouse squinted thoughtfully at where the balloon had disappeared into the maroon murk. "How are we going to do that?"

"Oh, Danny, Danny. How ignorant you Americans are! Simple trigonometry. I have right ascension sighting of balloon after twenty seconds, correct? So I have one angle of right triangle. Second angle must

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be ninety degrees—you understand that this is so? Otherwise would not be right triangle. So simple subtraction from one hundred eighty gives me angle remaining, and I have thus described triangle perfectly, except for dimension of sides. Okay. I now feed in dimension of first side, and simple transformation—''

''Whoa! You didn't measure anything. Where did you get the dimension of one side?''

''Altitude of balloon after twenty seconds, of course.''

''But how do you know—''

''Ah,'' said Kappelyushnikov smugly, ''that is why care is so important in weighing off balloon. With fixed lift, balloon rises at fixed rate. Lift is equal to one silver ruble, and so in each twenty seconds rises nine point seven three meters. We now perform same arithmetic for declination and we have fixed position of balloon in three-dimensional space. Here, walk while we talk.'' He took the jotted readings from Danny and scanned them, frowning. ''Such terrible writing,'' he complained. ''Nevertheless, I can read them perhaps well enough to feed into the computer. Is very easy computation.''

''Then why do you need a computer?''

''Oh, I could easily perform operations myself. But computer needs practice. Wait one, Danny.''

While the Russian was mumbling to himself over the keyboard, Harriet poked her head in the tent. ''What are you doing?'' she demanded sharply.

''Important scientific research,'' said Kappelyushnikov airily, without looking up. To Danny's surprise, the translator did not react. She looked sullen, confused and unhappy. Her normal look was not so far from that that it was unconspicuous, but her normal behavior was a good deal more abrasive than her demeanor now. She came quietly into the tent and sat down, thumbing dispiritedly through her translation notes.

''Have it!'' cried the pilot happily, and pressed a command button. The liquid crystal over the computer flashed colored darts of light, then revealed a plot of wind arrows. ''Colors of spectrum,'' Kappelyushnikov explained. ''Red is lowest, up to fresh grass green for highest. You see? At fifty meters, wind heading one forty-five degrees, eight k.p.h. At one hundred meters, backing to ninety-five degrees and now fifteen kilometers. And so on. Triumph of Soviet technology.''

Dalehouse nodded appreciatively. ''That's very nice, but what do we want to know that for?''

''Meteorology,'' Kappelyushnikov grinned, winking and moving his head toward Harriet. The woman looked up and burst out:

''Cut that out, Vissarion. I'm in no mood for you to make fun of me. Tell Dalehouse your real reason.''

The Russian looked surprised, and a little thoughtful, but he shrugged.

''All right. Poor American Danny, you are helpless without your machines. But not I. I am pilot! I do not wish to be earthworm like one of those things we shit on in your latrine, Danny. I want

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something to fly. They will not give me fuel. They will not let me have structural materials for glider—would be easy, except for launching; plenty of winds here, you see. But Gasha says no, so what can I do? I look up and see the balloonists floating around sky and I say I also will be balloonist!" He pounded his fist on the top of the computer. "Have gas. Have navigation information for winds aloft. Have Soviet know-how. So now I will make little balloon, big enough for me, and I will pilot again."

A surge of enthusiasm infected Dalehouse. "Hey, that's great. Would it work?"

"Of course would work!"

"We could use it to take after those balloonists. Get close to them. Harriet, do you hear that? It would give us a chance to try to talk to them."

"That's fine," she said, and Dalehouse looked at her more closely. Even for Harriet she looked sullen.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

She said, "I located the radio."

"The one that blew away in the storm?"

She laughed, like a cartoon figure laughing: *Heh, heh, heh.* "It takes a real idiot to believe that one. How could it blow away? God-damned thing weighs twenty kilos. It occured to me it might be transmitting, so I listened, and it was. I tried RDFing, and I got a fix right away. Straight down," she said, staring at them. "The damn thing is right down underneath us in the ground."

* * *

A minute was still a minute. Danny made sure of that, because he had begun to doubt. His pulse was still forty-two in sixty seconds by the clock. He could hold his breath for three of the minutes and maybe a bit more. The small change of time had not altered in value. But one thousand four hundred and forty minutes did not seem to make a day any more. Sometimes if felt as though a whole day had passed, and the clock said only six or seven hours. Sometimes it would occur to him to be tired, and the clock would show as much as thirty hours since he slept last. Fretfully Harriet tried to keep them all on some regular schedule, not because it seemed necessary but because it was orderly. She failed. Within—what? a week?—they were sleeping when they wanted to and eating when they felt hungry, and marking the passage of time, if at all, by events. The first near visit by balloonists was after the big storm, and before the Peeps received their reinforcement of personnel. The time Kappelyushnikov triangulated the missing radio for Harriet and discovered it was at least twenty meters underground was just after they sent their first reports and shipment of specimens back to Earth. And the time balloonists came to visit—

That was a whole other thing, the kind of event that changes everything fore and aft.

Dalehouse woke up with his mind in the sky. He did his chores. He helped Morrissey check his traps, prepared a meal of desecrated stew, fixed a valve in the shower stall by the lake. But what he was thinking

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of was Kappelyushnikov's balloons. Danny had talked him out of the big single hydrogen-filled bag: too big; too clumsy; too hard to manufacture, and above all too likely to kill its passenger if anything popped its skin. So they had painstakingly blown a hundred pibal-sized bags, and the Russian had knotted up a netting to contain them. The aggregate lift would be as much as you wanted. All it took was more balloons; you could multiply them to lift the entire camp if you liked. But if one or two popped, it did not mean a dead aeronaut. The passenger would descend reasonably slowly—to be more accurate, they were optimistically hopeful the passenger would descend slowly. He might damage himself. But at least he would not be spread flat across the Klongan landscape.

Kappelyushnikov would not allow Danny to do the final stages of filling and trying the balloons—"Is my neck, dear Danny, so is my job to make sure it stays okay."

"But you're taking so damn long. Let me help."

"*Nyet*. Is very clear," grinned the pilot, "that you think pretty soon you too will fly my balloons. Maybe so. But this time I am sole cargo. And besides, have still static lift tests to finish. Until then not even I fly."

Dalehouse fidgeted away, disgruntled. He had been on Klong for—whatever length of time it was; a couple of weeks, at least. And the author of "Preliminary Studies toward a First Contact with Subtechnological Sentients" had yet to meet his first subtechnological sentient.

Oh, he had seen them. There were burrowers under his feet, and he was sure he had caught a glimpse of something when Morrissey exploded a charge under a presumed tunnel. The Krinpit had been his fellow passenger for half an hour. And the balloonists were often in the sky, though seldom nearby. Three separate races to study and deal with! And the most productive thing he had done was to dig a latrine.

He fidgeted his way into Harriet's tent, hoping to find that she had miraculously made some giant leap in translation of one of the languages—if they were languages. She wasn't there, but the tapes were. He played the best of them over and over, until Kappelyushnikov came in, sweating and cheerful. "Static test is good. Plenty lift. Now we let whole mishmash sit for a while, check for leaks. You are enjoying concert of airborne friends?"

"It isn't a concert, it's a language. I *think* it's a language. It's not random bird calls. You can hear them singing in chords and harmonies. It's chromatic rather than—do you know anything about music theory?"

"Me? Please, Danny. I am pilot, not long-haired fiddle player."

"Well, anyway, it's chromatic rather than diatonic, but the harmonies are there, not too far off what you might hear in, say, Scriabin."

"Fine composer," the Russian beamed. "But tell me. Why do you listen to tapes when you have real thing right outside?"

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Startled, Danny raised his head. It was true. Some of the sounds he was hearing came from somewhere outside the tent. "Also," Kappelyushnikov went on severely, "you are breaking Gasha's rice bowl. She is translator, not you, and she is very difficult lady. So come now and listen to your pink and green friends."

* * *

The balloonists had never been so close, or so many of them. The whole camp was staring up at them, hundreds of them, so many that they obscured each other and blotted out part of the sky. The red glower of Kung shone through them dimly as they passed before its disk, but many of them were glowing with their own firefly light, mostly, as Kappelyushnikov had said, pink and pale green. Their song was loud and clear. Harriet was there already, microphone extended to catch every note, listening critically with an expression of distaste. That meant nothing. It was just the way she always looked.

"Why so close?" Dalehouse marveled.

"I do not wish to break your rice bowl either, dear Danny. You are expert. But I think is possible they like what we put up for chopper pilot." And Kappelyushnikov waved to the strobe beacon on the tower.

"Um." Danny considered a moment. "Let's see. Do me a favor and get one of the portable floodlights. We'll see them better, and maybe it'll bring them even closer."

"Why not?" The Russian disappeared inside the supply tent, and came back with the portable in one hand and the batteries in the other, cursing as he tried to avoid stumbling over the wires. He fumbled with it, and its dense white beam abruptly extended itself toward the horizon, then danced up toward the balloonist. It seemed to excite them. Their chirps, squeals, flatulences and cello drones multiplied themselves in a shower of grace notes, and they seemed to follow the beam.

"How do they do that?" Harriet demanded fretfully. "They've got no wings or anything that I can see."

"Same as I, dear Gasha," boomed the Russian. "Up and down, to find a truly sympathetic current of air. Here, you hold light. I must watch experts and learn!"

The balloonists were coming closer. Evidently the light attracted them. Now that there was enough brightness to make the colors plain, the variety of their patterns was striking. There were cloudlike whorls, solid bands, crosshatchings, dazzle designs that resembled World War I camouflage. "Funny," said Dalehouse, staring longingly at the swarm. "Why would they have all those colors when they can't see them most of the time?"

"Is your opinion they can't," said Kappelyushnikov. "Light like beet juice is strange to us, we see only the red. But for them perhaps is—Ho, Morrissey! Good shot!"

Dalehouse jumped a quarter of a meter as the camp's one and only shotgun went off behind him. Over-

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head, one of the balloonists was spiraling toward the ground. "I get," yelled Kappelyushnikov, and sprinted off to intersect its fall.

"*What the hell did you do?*" blazed Dalehouse.

The biologist turned a startled and defensive face toward him. "I collected a specimen," he said.

Harriet laughed disagreeably. "Shame on you, Morrissey. You didn't get Dalehouse's permission to shoot one of his friends. That's the price you pay for being a specialist in sentients, you fall in love with your subjects."

"Don't be bitchy, Harriet. My job's hard enough, this'll make it impossible. Shooting at them is the surest way to drive them away."

"Oh, sure, Dalehouse. Anybody can see they're stampeding in terror, right?" She waved a casual hand at the flock, still milling through the light and singing as they soared delightedly overhead.

Kappelyushnikov came back with a rubbery sac draped over his shoulder. "Almost had to fight off one of your Krinpit friends to get it," he growled. "Was big, ugly mother. Don't know what I would have done if he had truly contested ownership. But he scuttled away."

"There are no Krinpits around here," Harriet said sharply.

"Are now, Gasha. Never mind. See how pretty our new pet is."

The creature was not dead. It did not seem even wounded, or at least there was no blood. The shotgun pellets had blown a hole in the gasbag and nothing else. Its little face was working, looking like the countenance of an engorged tick, with great eyes staring at them. It was making the tiniest of sounds, almost like gasps.

"Disgusting," said Harriet, drawing back. "Why isn't it screaming?"

"If I knew the answers to questions like that," said Morrissey, dropping to one knee beside the creature to see it better, "I wouldn't have to collect specimens, would I? But at a guess, it would be, if I hadn't shot the breath out of it. I think it uses the hydrogen for vocalizing. God knows what it breathes. Must be oxygen, of course, but—" He shook his head, and glanced up. "Maybe I ought to collect a few more."

"No!"

"Christ, Dalehouse! You know, Harriet's right about you? Well—I know. At least let's see how phototropic they are. Hand me those shells." Zvonkov passed over the plastic belt of ammunition, and Morrissey pawed through it until he found a signal flare.

"You'll set fire to them, Morrissey! That's hydrogen in those bags!"

"Oh, cripes." But the biologist aimed carefully to one side of the flock. More and more of them were entering into the beam, now steady as Harriet had put it on the ground, pointing up, the whole diffuse swarm contracting into a knotted mass.

When the flare went off the whole flock seemed to twitch like a single organism. They didn't swarm toward it. They stayed bunched in an ellipsoidal huddle along the axis of the beam of light; but their song changed to reach a frantic crescendo, and there seemed to be a

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systematic rearranging of positions within the flock. The smaller and less brightly colored individuals bobbed toward the lower portions of the school, and the larger and gaudier ones lifted toward the top. Dalehouse stared in fascination, so entranced that he did not realize his face was sticky and wet until Kappelyushnikov grunted in surprise.

"Hey! Is raining?"

But it wasn't rain. It was sweet and pungent on their lips, with an aftertaste that was animal and fetid; it fell like a gentle dew on their upturned faces and clung to their skins.

"Don't swallow any!" cried Morrisssey, in belated panic. But it was too late for that. Some of the people were already licking their lips. Not that it mattered, thought Dalehouse, the stuff was all over them. If it was poisonous they were done for.

"You fools!" cried Harriet, stamping her foot. She had never been attractive, and now she looked like a witch, sallow face in a grimace, uneven teeth bared. "We've got to get this stuff off. Kappelyushnikov, you and Morrissey get buckets of water at once."

"*Da*, Gasha," said the pilot dreamily.

"*Now!*" she screamed.

"Oh, of course, now." He lumbered off a few steps, then paused and looked coquettishly back over his shoulder. "Alyusha, dear. You help me get important water right away?"

The navigator simpered. She answered him in Russian, something that made Kappelyushnikov grin and Harriet swear. "Don't you clods know we're all in *danger*?" she cried, catching at Dalehouse's hand imploringly. "You, Danny, you've always been nicer to me than those other bastards. Help me get water."

He returned the pressure of her hand and whispered, "Hell, yes, honey, let's get some water."

"Danny!" But she wasn't angry any more. She was smiling, allowing him to tug her toward the lakefront. He ran his tongue over his lips again. Whatever the dew was, the more he tasted it the better he liked it: not sweet, not tart, not like fruit or meat, not like flowers. It was not like anything he had ever tasted before, but it was a taste he wanted more of. He saw Harriet touching her pointed tongue to her own thin lips, and was suddenly seized with the need to taste that Klongan mist from her mouth. He felt the damp heat rising inside him, and caught her roughly around the waist.

They kissed desperately, their hands busy ripping each others' clothes off.

It never occured to them to think of hiding themselves. They cared nothing for what the others in the expedition might think of them, and the others cared no more for Harriet and Dalehouse. In couples and clusters the entire expedition was down on the ground in a mass fury of copulation, while overhead the swooping balloonists sang and soared through the searchlight and their gentle mist rained down on the human beings below.

TO BE CONTINUED

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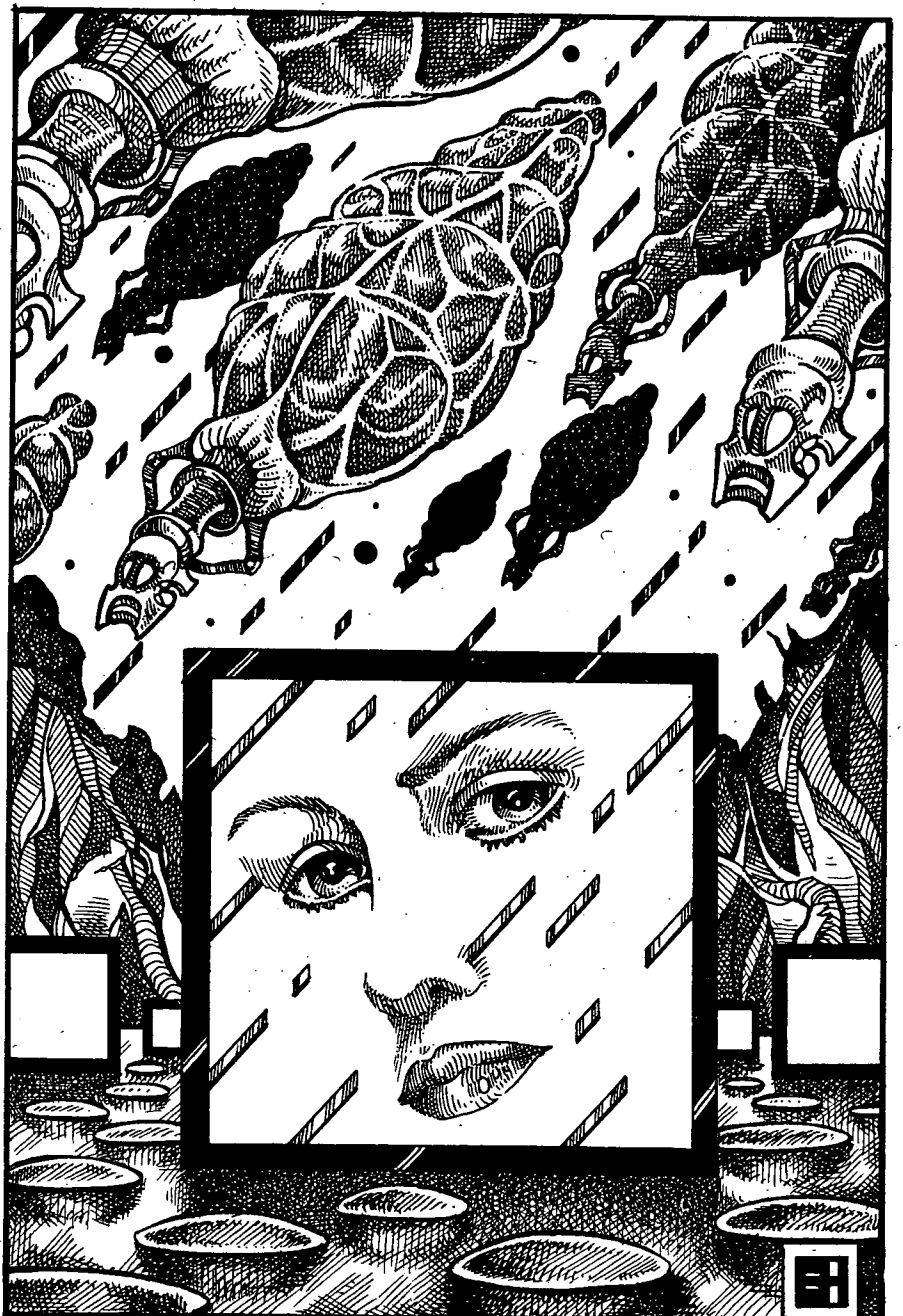

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His addiction made him a pariah to all mankind. One woman could forgive him, if he could forgive himself.

I WAS DIFFERENT, THEN.

I remember collecting my separation pay and taking the lighter down to Port City, leaving the ship in orbit behind me. It felt strange leaving the *Titus Groan*. She had been home for me for many years. But I wanted to live in a city again. I could afford to forget about space for a while. There would always be work for a paramed-rated phase-shift navigator. I wanted to raise some hell.

And that I did. I immersed myself in lusting, drinking and glorious, sweaty, knock-down brawling, ridding myself of all the stored energy accumulated over the years.

Port City was accustomed to spacers running wild; it was an occupational hazard. And there was profit to be made from it. I must have had a good time during that first month because I don't remember very much of it. One night I passed out in the middle of a filthy chanty somebody was singing. I think it was me.

I awoke—perhaps revived would be a better word—to see the vague outlines of four people standing around me. My head was cradled in the lap of a fifth. A girl. Even in that condition, I could tell. She was trying to force some liquid into my mouth. I gagged, coughed, sputtered and sprayed most of whatever it was all over her legs.

"Look, it's moving!"

"Do you think it's intelligent?"

"Don't be ridiculous. Would an intelligent being sing anything like *that*?"

"Yes, it was rather fascinating, wasn't it? You think it will sing again if we buy it some more whisky?"

"I think that if we buy it any more whisky, it'll collapse."

I was trying to focus in on the faces—but I wasn't having much luck. I tried to stand up but the room wouldn't hold still. I fell flat on my face. My nose broke.

"Oh, dear, he's not going to die, is he? What a mess! Cilix, Irina, help him up. I won't allow him to expire without finishing that song."

They lifted me onto a chair but my spine had turned to jelly. I felt the blood running down my face. I heard a loud *thunk* and realized it was the sound of my head hitting the table. I opened my eyes and saw the sympathy fir in its container begin to respond to me. As I watched it weave and sway drunkenly, I began to feel nauseous.

They had the bartender give me a small dose of adrenalin and after what seemed like several gallons of Terran coffee (I didn't want to think

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of what it was costing me), I began to see straight again.

My nose had been broken several times before and I was used to setting it myself. I slapped some plastic on the break in the skin and asked the serving unit to bring me some cigarettes. They were expensive but about three times stronger than anything I had ever smoked. Probably artificial.

My rescuers were young Bohemians. Artists. Jaded children with no goals or directions. I sang the song for them from start to finish but it took some explaining. It was an ancient Terran chanty concerning the amorous adventures of a sailor named Barnacle Bill. It wasn't too difficult to translate the slang but I couldn't remember what a barnacle was. I told them that it was probably a part of an early reactor drive.

Yuri listened to it all with a bemused smile. She cultivated an ethereal air. A poet. She recited some of her work. It was terrible. Jil was a painter and, apparently, a successful one. She paid for the others. I liked her infectious, warbling laugh and the way she joined in with me on the chorus. Cilix was a fallen academician of some sort. I couldn't really tell what he was thinking, he didn't talk much. But then again, I never could read Ophidians very well. Anthrus, on the other hand, spoke constantly. He considered himself a wit. I considered him a cynic. But I wasn't paying much attention to him. I couldn't take my eyes off Irina.

Irina was wonderful. Slim, tall and fair-skinned. She didn't paint herself as most women did. Her skull was bare except for a tiny blossom tattooed on her cranium. Even her slightest movement was graceful. Irina knew she was beautiful and she wore it well. My feelings towards her weren't lustful but . . . affectionate. I wanted to hold her, to stroke her cheek, to be gentle with her. I wanted to hear her sigh. I tried not to stare but I'm afraid it was a failed effort.

As we spoke, the gentle flow of the sympathy fir dimmed slightly and then began to flicker. Patrons at surrounding tables, who had noticed similar reactions from their centerpieces, looked around to see what was disturbing the psychosensitive plants. Without glancing up from his wine, Anthrus smiled enigmatically and said, "John is here."

Irina tossed back her drink and announced that she was leaving but Anthrus held her by the arm and shook his head. She sat down again, uneasily. I glanced around at my companions, puzzled. Cilix, Jil and Yuri had all become suddenly glum. Anthrus pursed his lips and fixed me with his ice-blue stare.

"When John enters a room," he said, "one gets the feeling somebody just left."

I noticed that several people in our immediate vicinity were, in fact, leaving. Our little group was rapidly becoming an island. It was only then that I saw John. He appeared at Anthrus' left shoulder. Our plant shivered and its halo all but disappeared.

He was tall. The shabby surplice covered a uniform that was familiar but I couldn't place it. The gaunt and craggy features had an almost gray pallor and his hair was long and stringy. But the eyes were the

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most striking thing about him. Vacant. Totally devoid of any expression, of any life.

"John, how nice to see you." Anthrus beckoned him to a chair. "Sit down and join us. Wine?"

"No, thank you," the spectre answered in a voice as tired and empty as a derelict of space. He sat down and I stared as the fir quite literally *strained* away from him.

Outside of the fact that John was as lost a looking soul as I had ever seen, I could not understand what it was about the man that seemed to cause everyone such concern. He did not strike me as a particularly disturbing individual—but the firs knew better. Every one of the sensitive plants within several meters of us was flickering like mad and our own fir was behaving as though it had the botanical equivalent of St. Vitus's dance.

The manager of the bistro approached our table, his hands clenched in massive fists.

"I have made it known to you," he said in his heavily accented English, "that I do not wish your presence here. You disturb the business, John."

"You have no right to bar this man from the premises," countered Anthrus. "He's done nothing wrong. He has not broken any laws."

"I have no right," agreed the manager. "You can report me if you wish."

"I shall."

"Nevertheless, he must leave at once."

Throughout the exchange John sat motionless as though completely unaware of what was going on around him.

"If he leaves, then we all leave with him," Anthrus declared.

Of course we all left. Having nothing else to do, I went with them. The others had grown silent. The talkative Jil had become a sudden introvert. Cilix and Yuri both looked straight ahead as they walked and Irina looked upset. In an effort to break the awkward silence, I asked John if he was thrown out often.

He answered simply, "Yes."

"But . . . why?"

He replied, "I have a surrogate," and then abruptly walked away.

* * *

"I don't like him," Irina said, lounging with her shoes off.

"Oh, I don't know. I find his company stimulating." Anthrus grinned at her. "Don't you?"

She snorted derisively and went back to doing nothing. She did it very gracefully.

"Who is he?" I asked.

Cilix paused in his preparation of the yola leaves.

"He was a merchant spacer, like yourself. A mercenary, wasn't he?"

"Ask Anthrus," Yuri replied as she carefully applied paint to her depilated cranium. "He's our expert on the walking dead."

"The walking dead?"

"Yuri is being true to her melodramatic Russian heritage," smiled Anthrus. "Yes, John was a mercenary, I suppose. I can't think who else of Terran origin would want to crew for the Lhari."

That was where I had seen the uniform. "What happened to him?"

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"He picked up a habit," answered Cilix, setting down the bowl of husked yola leaves.

"Is that what he meant when he said he had a surrogate?" I chose a leaf from the bowl and popped it in my mouth, feeling the delicious coolness as it melted. Anthrus looked surprised.

"You mean that in all your travels you never heard of the surrogate lizard? That so-called legendary creature?"

I had to admit ignorance.

"Ah!" Anthrus leaned forward, pleased with his captive audience. "I enjoy telling this story!"

"Be kind for once," Yuri said dryly. "Make it short."

"Oh, very well." Anthrus made a mock bow in her direction. "I shall be merciful. Short and to the point." He turned to me. "You've heard of a planet named Xerxes V, in the Julianas?"

I had. "A quarantined world."

Anthrus shrugged. "Why should that concern the Lhari? Their crews are expendable."

I nodded grimly. With their high pay came high risk.

"So," continued Anthrus, "one of John's shipmates was bitten by a surrogate while there. It came aboard with him, that is, he smuggled it in. It is a curious sort of reptile, births just like a mammal. It's quite remarkable. Well, to be brief, this lizard was pregnant. Its offspring crawled into John's berth one night and became his personal parasite."

"*Parasite*? When Cilix said he had a habit, I naturally assumed some sort of narcotic or—"

"But the surrogate *is* a habit! A deadly one." Anthrus' eyes glittered with a positively necrophilic delight. "It has a narcotic effect upon its host. Once bitten by a surrogate, you're doomed. You simply cannot live without it. Its secretions are addictive. Eventually the host dies. How soon depends mainly upon the host's constitution and the lizard's appetite. John and his surrogate seem to have developed a rather successful symbiotic relationship. He's been lingering for years. His is a pragmatic parasite. It knows John's biological limitations very well."

"It *knows*?"

"Oh, yes, it *knows*! The surrogate is sentient. It possesses an intellect of a very high order. The species, as I understand it, is quite rare and indigenous only to Xerxes. Most people think its existence is a myth." He grinned wolfishly. "My friends, we simply *must* have another demonstration!"

Amidst their moans and cries of protest, he turned to me and said, "This will be an experience you shall remember."

* * *

"Pay the man."

"Anthrus, no!" Irina showed a sudden concern. "Don't do this to him. *Please*."

"Why should I pay him?"

Anthrus smiled, again that enigmatic rictus. "He will tell you about yourself."

Yuri took my hand, pressing it earnestly. "Don't do it. Don't listen to him."

But Anthrus knew I would My curiosity was hooked. I paid John

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while Yuri cleared the table, keeping her eyes averted from our guest. Once again a pall had fallen on my friends. Once again Irina tried to leave and Anthrus prevented it. I was beginning to resent his domination of her. Cilix rose to dim the lights.

"Oh, no, no, Cilix! Bring a fir," said Anthrus gleefully. "This must be a *complete* experience."

His thin lips compressed, Cilix placed a fir upon the table. Immediately it began to tremble and its glow began to wane. Anthrus beckoned and we formed a circle, seated around the table.

"Shall I begin?"

Anthrus looked to me to answer John. I nodded.

Slowly John removed his outer surplice. Beneath it, clinging to his shabby Lhari uniform—the surrogate.

It was approximately fifteen centimeters long—and bright, bright yellow. My initial impression was that it resembled a salamander but the head was too big for that. Its eyes were closed and it appeared to be asleep. With two fingers of his left hand John gently stroked it. The lizard moved.

The creature detached itself from John's tunic and crawled down onto the surface of the table. There was something repulsive about its movements. Yuri swallowed nervously. She looked frightened. Jil's expression was one of horror. Irina looked disgusted. And Anthrus—

But the lizard! Slowly its head turned in my direction and it looked at me. There was nothing reptilian in those eyes. On a small scale they were almost human in appearance. Blue. Set deep in that pyramid-shaped head. And it was *looking* at me!

Them, with blinding speed, it leaped up on John's exposed right forearm, sinking its claws deep into the flesh. John winced. Again those blue eyes looked at me just before the jaws gaped open. Two iridescent, snake-like fangs. Slowly, hideously, like a lover, the lizard sank those tesselated nightmares into the soft flesh just below John's bicep.

Irina gagged and shut her eyes. The others watched in frozen fascination.

The hypersensitive fir had torn itself from its container by the roots. It lay thrashing on the table, its glow extinguished, dying.

John's eyes were closed in ecstasy. A tiny tear of blood welled in the corner of his mouth where he had bitten through his lip. He shivered—shook—and then was still. The lizard sucked, immobile.

A gradual change came over John. He sighed deeply. His skin was flushed, his forehead damp with beads of perspiration. The ashen gray of his complexion faded away and in its place a robust glow of health shone forth. He opened his eyes, flashed a stunning smile and winked. Then, taking his discarded surplice, he draped it over his arm, hiding the lizard from view.

"It disturbs some people to have to look at it," he explained in a voice totally different from the one I had heard him use before. He raised a glass of wine and toasted us. We drank—he with gusto, the rest of us with trepidation. He

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looked at Anthrus with a dazzling smile.

"Well, my predatory friend," he said, "another night of voyeurism for you as my brother spacer turns slowly on the spit." He winked at me. "You will get your money's worth tonight, I promise you."

"All right. So you're a gypsy, then? What can you tell me of myself?" I asked him.

He chuckled. "Only everything." Again that brilliant smile, disarming and sincere. "You're certain that you want to know?"

I nodded, skeptical. I had known gypsies in my time, although none whose act was quite so spectacular. He was a showman, that I had to grant him.

"You're wrong," he laughed. "I'm not an actor and this is not a farce."

I was impressed. "Not bad. Telepathy? Or simple ESP?" I couldn't keep from smirking but he didn't seem to notice.

"Mm, yes, I suppose you could say that. And, also, no. Let's just say I have a way of sensing the truth."

Anthrus was watching us intently.

"Indeed?" I asked. "And just what is the truth?"

He cocked an eyebrow at me. "Well, there are more truths than you know. For example, your feelings toward Irina."

I felt a sudden tightness in my stomach. My eyes met hers and saw surprise. She did not look away.

"And she, of course, is flattered by this bit of information," John continued. "Because, you see, Irina has a hunger for much more than our friend Anthrus, here, can give her. She's thought about you once or twice. She's thinking about you now. About what you look like sans your clothing. Shall I tell her?"

I think I blushed. Anthrus threw back his head and laughed.

"Don't let his laughter fool you," John warned, looking at me seriously. "He really doesn't like you, you-know."

"That's right, I don't." Anthrus had a strange look on his face. "I don't like you at all. But then, I don't like anyone. John's told me that before. I have too strong a sense of self. The ideal hedonist devotes himself full time to his own ego. But our Irina, well, she devotes herself to passion, don't you, my love?" She was looking at me, not at Anthrus. "So you like our new friend?" he went on. "Well, go on, enjoy him. He's relatively young and twice as strong as I, no doubt. Go on. But I shall hate you for it. Perhaps you'll let me watch?"

"That wasn't funny, Anthrus," I snapped.

"It wasn't meant to be. You see, we have to tell the truth tonight. Otherwise John will catch us in our dissembling. Because he *knows* the truth. And. John is never, ever, wrong."

"He's right," John said. "I never am. And that explains your earlier confusion as to why I'm so universally disliked. It isn't that I am, as you so aptly pictured me, as lost a looking soul as you have ever seen. Most people find tragic losers reassuring in a way. They feel superior in seeing someone worse off than they themselves. The simple fact is that no one, no life form

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as I know it, can bear to hear the unadulterated truth about itself. The truth is too disconcerting. It strips away pretensions and defenses. Nobody really wants to hear the truth when lies are so much more attractive."

"And the truth about yourself?" I asked.

"You did not pay for that."

"I'll pay you now."

"I'm not that hungry. Besides, tonight is yours. I have much more to tell."

And so it went. A brutal session of unspeakable encounter. He laughed, he smiled, he charmed. He told me things about myself that were so deeply buried that my conscious mind had never thought to resurrect them.

And, finally, there was a stirring beneath the surplice. The lizard crawled back up John's arm and took its place upon his chest. It shut his eyes and moved no more. The surrogate—sated—slept.

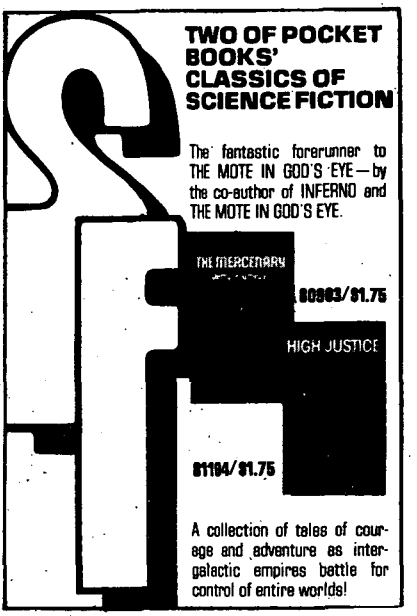
And as I sat there, stunned, the man's effervescence faded. The spark diminished in his eyes until once again they glazed over. His skin resumed its ghastly pallor. The life was gone, the shell remained. With a tired, hollow voice, the spacer thanked us. Then he stumbled through the portal and was gone.

I said, "I think I'd like to kill him."

Anthrus chuckled. "But you can't. He's too compelling. Who among us, after all, can kill the truth?"

Yuri sighed wearily. "And you said *I* was melodramatic?"

I found it difficult to look at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Irina, sitting with Anthrus' gracefully clawed hand covering her own. I was not normally given to prejudice but, watching them, I felt more strongly than ever that the Terran girl belonged with me, with one of her own.

"I certainly wish I had psi powers as effective as his," I said, trying to keep the irony out of my voice.

Cilix thoughtfully stroked the stem of his goblet.

"You still don't understand, do you?" He was regarding me with that unblinking Ophidian stare. "John has no psi powers. He is not an empath or a gypsy or even a very perceptive human being. John is a pitiable derelict. That is all he is and that is all he ever shall be."

"But, then, how—"

"The surrogate," answered Yuri.

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"It speaks through John. The lizard has no vocal chords of its own, nor does it have any kind of telepathic ability. As John says, he—it—*senses* the truth. And it uses its host as a means to communicate."

"You look startled," Anthrus grinned. "I *told* you that the lizard possessed an intellect of a very high order. I wonder if we can persuade John to allow himself to be scanned *next time*? Wouldn't it be amusing if it turned out that the surrogate's intelligence was superior to any of ours? Small wonder Xerxes V was placed under quarantine!"

"I feel sorry for him," Jil said softly. Her voice had a meek and gentle quality. She seemed to speak more to herself than to the others. "I wish there was something we could do to help him."

"Your sympathy for him is very touching," said Anthrus flatly, "but to interfere would only cause you grief. Nothing can be done. He is an undesirable. Where can he go? What can he do? John really lives only when those fangs are in his veins. Tonight he shone and glittered; he radiated truth and brilliance and provided us with much amusement—"

"Speak for yourself," interjected Yuri.

"—and for all we know, he's better off that way. We've seen what he is like in normal circumstances. Won't eat more than is necessary to barely stay alive, won't drink, won't laugh, won't even cry as humans do so often. . ."

I saw Irina wince.

". . . why, without the lizard, he would die. He told me so himself. His apathy may be his normal state. After crewing for the Lhari, I shouldn't be surprised if that were so. And if that's the case, well, then the lizard saves him. And you must admit," he looked at me and smiled maliciously, "John has become a fascinating creature. Now, thanks to him, we know all your inner thoughts and secrets."

I watched him as he smirked and gloated over how he had maneuvered me to be hoisted on my own petard.

"I must admit I am surprised, though," he continued. "I know you hated what you heard tonight. I know it must have hurt you deeply. And yet, you're unashamed. How is that possible? I was under the impression that I knew human nature."

He turned his strangely beautiful face to Irina and chucked her chin gently with his fragile fingers, having sheathed his claws.

"We must talk about this tonight, Irina. We really must discuss our new friend here. Why is he unashamed? *Your* reactions were rather different, as I recall."

* * *

I sought solace in the quiet, moonless night. Standing naked on the balcony, I felt the warm northern breezes on my skin and I breathed in deep lungfuls of the humid air.

The others slept. I was thinking while looking at one of Jil's paintings, not yet finished, resting on its metal stand and glistening in the soft light. I turned down the illumination on the balcony so I could see the painting's luminescent glow. It

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was the face of John. The eyes in the painting were sad, unlike the glazed and lifeless ones of the model.

"I wonder if you feel anything at all?" I murmured to the painting. "What's it like, being used as a surrogate mouth by the very being that destroys you? What do you feel when you look into someone else's soul?"

"I often wonder about that myself," said Jil. She sat behind me, in the shadows. She had been so still, I had not noticed her. I stared at the red fire of her eyes, two glowing dots that floated up as she rose and came toward me.

"This one will sell," I gestured at the painting. "To a stranger who hasn't met the original. It's the eyes. The sort of look one sees in poets' eyes, I suppose."

"I don't think that I will sell it," she said. She, too, had undressed to enjoy the evening breeze. Her fur rippled in the gentle wind. "This painting gives me. . ." she hesitated. "There's not a word for it in English." She made a sound no human throat could copy. "It's just one word and yet it means so many things. I really can't explain."

"It's all right. I think I understand."

Then I became aware that I was speaking to a different Jil. This Jil was very serious.

"You're not yourself tonight," I said.

"At home, in our society, we wear two faces," she explained. "One we present from day to day to those around us in order to accommodate their actions. The other is for family and friends—the private face." She pointed to the chamber shared by Anthrus and Irina. "You want a lover but you need a friend."

Before I could reply, she placed two fingers on my lips and held them there.

"You shouldn't sleep tonight," she said. "Stay here. Watch the night and think about the things the surrogate told you. Few people really know themselves. Confronted with such knowledge all at once, it's easy to deny the truth. It's simple not to face it. That's why John is hated. But he's really blameless. You should not hate a man for things said by a voice that he cannot control."

She left me then so that I could be alone. I felt the need to walk. I dressed quietly so as not to wake the others.

* * *

Port City never slept. It had too many diverse life forms to accommodate. There were five "standard" languages spoken and the city was subdivided into a variety of environments. Anyone who did not fit in had to adapt as best he could but there were even facilities to help accomplish that, provided one could pay.

It was an exciting city—the new Rome to which all space routes led. But like the original Rome of primordial times, this Rome had its share of decadence and desolation. I had been attracted by the decadence. What I found instead was something else entirely.

"Where are we going?"

Irina!

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"I thought you were asleep," I told her. "I'm sorry if I woke you."

"I'm a light sleeper. Not like Anthrus."

"Why did you follow me?"

"Can't you guess?" She linked her arm with mine as we walked. "Don't tell me we need John here to tell us all about each other." There was an unpleasant edge to her voice.

"You're beginning to sound like Anthrus."

"Must we talk about him?"

"Why not? The three of us don't have any secrets from each other any more, do we? The surrogate saw to that."

"He disgusts me!" I was surprised at her vehemence. "How anyone can allow himself to fall to such a state. . . ."

As she spoke, I suddenly realized that this was the first time we had been alone since they had picked me up off the bistro floor. I should have been taking advantage of the opportunity, but I wasn't. I kept thinking about what Jil had said. We walked a while in silence. Awkward silence. Irina was the first to break it.

"What's the matter? Don't you want me any more?"

I never thought I'd have to think before I answered such a question. "I . . . I'm not sure. I suppose so."

"You *suppose so*? That's a fine thing to say to a girl who offers you herself! I could be wrong but do I detect a certain lack of enthusiasm?"

"I'm just confused. I thought I knew myself inside and out. Oh, I knew I had a lot of shortcomings but—"

"Are you still thinking about John? Forget him. He's just a bum. He isn't important, you and I are. You shouldn't let him get to you."

"He seems to get to you, though. Anthrus must have arranged for the two of you to meet with John before, didn't he? A private session, just the three of you?"

I felt her arm tighten.

"No."

"No?"

"Not just the three of us."

Of course. The others would have been present, too. Anthrus would have seen to that. It also explained his earlier statements about the human capacity for shame. The experience had been a painful one for me. For Irina, it must have been truly humiliating.

"Why do you let him treat you that way?" I asked her. "Why do you stay with him? You aren't a masochist, are you?"

"You don't have to be insulting," she bristled. "If you don't want me, simply say so."

"Would you return to Anthrus?"

"Yes."

"Then I can't think of a single good reason why I should want you."

"Svolotch!" she swore at me in Russian. Her hands darted up to my face and I felt a sharp stab of pain as the long nails clawed. There was a sudden stickiness just above my left eye. She may have meant to blind me in her spite but I had already seen enough. I turned and left her standing there.

* * *

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The juice of the berries from the harlequin bush, unfermented, is a deadly poison. But when pressed and processed into wine, the berries have an anesthetic quality. I was feeling no pain.

I had wandered into the sanguine, sealed section of the city that had been set aside for the Frilissi, whose auditory membranes are so sensitive that theirs is, to humans, a virtually mute culture. What I perceived as silence was comforting to me. I had wanted to go someplace where I could be alone—nowhere is one so alone as in a crowd of total strangers.

I rubbed my thumb and forefinger together softly and an attendant appeared at my side. In his own language I subvocalized my request for more wine. He was pleased to see the pains I took not to let the slightest whisper escape my lips and he did his best to imitate a human smile, althouth it must have been uncomfortable for him. To a Frilissi, the baring of teeth is an offensive act. I thanked him for the compliment he paid me. Then suddenly he started.

The thick fibrafoam flooring had prevented my hearing any footsteps but someone had actually approached so silently that not even my attendant had been aware. It unsettled him greatly. Only one race of beings known to man can move so quietly when they want to, and we have no name for them. We cannot speak their language and so we call them by the adjective which most closely describes their appearance—feline.

Jil sat down and waited quietly until I had finished my wine. She did not know how to subvocalize and we could not otherwise communicate without causing severe pain to the Frilissi. Consequently we merely sat and watched each other. It felt nice.

I needed the wine to deaden my emotions so I could think clearly. I thought about how much Anthrus, Irina and I had in common. Like the surrogate, we were manipulators. Users. Small wonder Irina hated John so much. Acknowledging the ultimate victim must have been unpleasant for her. It had been for me. Hate was a convenient surrogate for guilt.

I couldn't remain in the Frilissi zone for long. Although I wasn't able to hear it, the ultra high-frequency pitch of their conversation was giving me a migraine. I paid my tab and we left. The sky looked like rain.

"You tracked me," I accused Jil then. "Why?"

She was embarrassed. She had to have smelled my clothes in order to be able to pick up my scent and since I had only the clothes on my back, she must have scented them in my room right after she left me on the balcony. She must have suspected that I would leave. But why should that fact have concerned her?

"You weren't going to come back, were you?" she countered my question.

"No," I said. "But you haven't answered me. What made you think I was going to leave? And why did you track me?"

It started raining. Jil turned as though to look for shelter but I grabbed her by the shoulders. She did not resist. We looked at each

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other for a long moment.

"Jil . . . I'm just some guy you picked up off the floor."

She looked down. The rain was matting her fur. She brushed at it absently. She looked like a drowned cat and I felt a giggle starting in my throat.

"I'm going to smell funny," she said.

I burst out laughing. She looked up in surprise and then she started laughing too. Our eyes met again and suddenly I wanted very much to kiss her . . . and I did.

"Do *you* want to go back?" I asked.

She shook her head. "I want to go with you."

"But your paintings?"

"I want only the one." I knew which one. "I can get it later. There's a hostel not far from here. Let's get a room."

I have been in rooms with females of all races, yet I was surprised to find myself feeling exhilarated and excited, as though I were about to have a new experience. But then, that is exactly what it was—a brand new experience. I had never gone to bed with a friend before. It felt happy.

Giggling like children, we ran through the downpour, dodging shuttlecraft and turbines, splashing in the puddles. I tripped and fell sprawling. We both were completely soaked and I could not remember when I had laughed so hard. Then, as I was getting up, I saw what I had tripped over.

It was John.

He way lying on his back in the street, his eyes wide open. He was dead.

Jil made a little mewling noise and looked away. I knelt over his body, brushing the straggly hair out of his face. His neck was broken and obviously he had been lying there for some time. I was brought back to reality. Someone had killed him. No one would ever know why and no one would ever care. Just another night in Port City.

Jil screamed then. Too late, I noticed that his surplice had been blown back by the wind and that the lizard wasn't there. It was climbing rapidly up my leg. I tried to beat it off but it was too fast for me.

I saw Jil run toward me and I yelled at her to stay back. And then I felt excruciating pain. I sank to my knees, tearing at the creature, but it would not let go. I screamed, half with pain, half with fear. Searing heat flowed through me. I felt dizzy. Weak. I heard Jil call my name. I could feel her hands touch me, trying to pry the creature loose, but she sounded far away. I could feel myself sweating. Warm. It was *so warm*! So relaxing and pleasant.

Let me go, Jil. Leave me alone, it feels good. I pushed her away roughly. I hadn't wanted to do that but it didn't matter. Nothing mattered. Don't cry, Jil, please. . . .

She doesn't understand.

How can I explain? It really doesn't hurt so much, it. . . .

You can't explain. She'll never understand. She doesn't want to. Forget her.

No. . . .

I felt like I was coated with warm vaseline. My skin had a consistency I never before realized. What a wonderful thing, my skin! Funny

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how I never noticed it before. The way the tiny little hairs on the back of my hand resemble a wheat field. . . .

And there's an area where the thumb and forefinger join in that little webbed part between the fingers—I could see a vein throbbing. Tiny, miniature eruptions of blood coursing through there, just below the skin . . . pump. Pump. Pump. Pump. Pump. Pump. . . .

My head seemed to be moving. Really wish it would stop, most distracting . . . *Jil? Is that you?* I couldn't seem to focus my vision. What? Why . . . she was slapping my face. Stupid thing to do.

Make her stop!

Right. Make her stop. Was it raining? Somehow I seem to remember rain. Strange. The sun was shining.

Variegated fields of indigo and scarlet, sanguine skies besmirched with gridelin and glowing golden birds.

Beautiful, isn't it?

Mmmmmmmm. . .

There was a village. Primitive. And people toiling in the gardens by their homes. Bandy-legged people with protruding eyes and gawky elbows. Frog-like. Docile. Calm. Serene. And each one with a lizard clinging. . . .

No, wait!

It was gone. I wanted to see more. The rain was trickling down my face, comingling with the sweat. The street was empty. I could hear traffic in the distance. Traffic and the dripping, plopping sound of rain. I was prostrate in a puddle. My vision cleared and I could see my predecessor, decaying

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in the damp. Poor John. And now poor me.

With a sloshing I raised myself to hands and knees and tried to gulp some air into my lungs. My head was hanging down. Dear God, it was so heavy, it was all that I could do to lift it. I did. And I saw Jil.

She was lying on her side, a stream of stark vermilion coloring the pavement by her face. Her lips were gashed, her pointy teeth were chipped . . . and the knuckles on my hand were cut and swollen.

It was clinging to my shoulder. Watching me. I began to heave.

My stomach kept contracting and I was racked with shivers. I crawled over to Jil, lying there bleeding in the rain. She wasn't badly hurt but I had knocked her senseless. In a fury I snatched for the *thing* that was clinging to my arm now. I felt the lizard's fangs, two heated razors slicing deep. Again I screamed. I never knew so many feelings in such a short span of time: frustration, hatred, helplessness and pity, rage and ecstasy, futility and fear and sweet, serene contentment.

And somewhere between the dreaming and the reality, I think, perhaps, I cried.

* * *

The bed was soaked with sweat. And there was an odor. It was not pleasant. It was coming from me. My eyes felt like rusty hinges as I tried to open them. I heard a familiar voice say, "Look, it's moving."

Déjà vu. Anthrus's smirking face floated into focus. I shut my eyes.

"Strange how ironic life can be, isn't it?"

There was the sound of a slap and a yelp of pain. I opened my eyes again to see Anthrus clutching the side of his head. Jil was standing with her back to me, her arm raised to strike again. There was a flicking noise as Anthrus showed his claws. And then Cilix was between them, urging, "Don't."

I watched them with detachment. Jil turned to face me. She did not look pretty. I had done more damage than I thought.

"How do you feel?" she asked.

My mouth moved of its own accord. It said, "Weak."

Cilix had shepherded Anthrus out of the room. Jil and I were alone. No. We weren't. *It* was with us.

"Sorry," I mumbled. But I wasn't.

She shrugged. It was a human gesture. Yet she made it look natural, somehow.

"I tried to . . ." She looked away.

"I tried to . . . to take that thing away while you were sleeping. . ."

It was resting on my chest, quiescent.

". . . but you wouldn't let me."

I stared at her. I heard what she was saying but it didn't seem important.

She sighed deeply. "Every time I came near, it . . . it would do something, I don't know what . . . or how. You wouldn't let us near you."

I had beaten Cilix. Also Yuri. She was with Irina, crying. And I had hurt Jil. Again. So? So Anthrus was right. Life can be ironic. I had come full circle. Wasn't this where I came in?

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"Stop it! Stop it!" Jil half screamed, half sobbed.

Why? What was . . . I had begun to absently stroke the lizard with two fingers of my left hand. The creature turned and watched her. And then it looked at me. Its gaze was direct. Comforting.

Cilix burst into the room as the lizard began crawling slowly, lazily, up my chest. I was dimly aware of Jil, straining against Cilix's grasp. She was hysterical. I wasn't paying much attention to them. I wished that *it* would hurry. . . .

The sounds of sobbing and screaming were fading. I felt the heat and shut my eyes. It was so wonderful and all I had to do was to simply lie there. The pain was part of it. The burning and the soreness . . . I'd come to know the soreness well. My arms inflamed from all its bites, my neck a mass of scar tissue from its feasting at my jugular, my skin broken into eczema and itching, I lived a scabrous existence in a semi-darkened room.

I heard its voice, I knew its truth, I saw its visions. I lived the story of the quarantine. I heard the voices from the past. The saga of the Zharii—the froggish, gangly people with the penetrating eyes.

"What do you mean they're not intelligent? Are you insane? Their level of—"

"I'm telling you, sir, they are *not intelligent*! There is no sentience. We've been communicating with the lizards."

And that was the beginning. It was then that they began the persecution.

But you were killing them. . . .

We were controlling them.

Voices. Distant voices. . . .

"It's the ecology. The Zharii breed like rabbits. The lizards are their predators."

"Good Lord!"

"We may be able to teach them zero population growth, or something. I don't know how it will work. . . ."

They tried. It cost them dearly.

Yes. It had indeed. The Terrans had deprived some of the lizards of their Zharii mounts. The results were catastrophic. I saw torn and bleeding bodies. Or what was left of bodies. Shredded human flesh, still-pulsating organs torn from dying men. Leaping maniacs with salivating mouths and fiendish, groping fingers . . . I couldn't beat them off! I couldn't . . . couldn't . . . .

Something grabbed me. Someone. Cilix. Jil was lying on the floor, a beaten mess. And there was Yuri. And Irina. Yuri kneeling by Jil's side, Irina with a kinjhal.

"*Sookin sin*! I'll carve the bastard!" She lunged and Yuri caught her arm.

"Let her," Anthrus said. "She's nursed a hate for him ever since he turned her down. Go on. Put the poor fool out of his misery."

"No. . ." Jil moaned faintly from the floor. "No, please! It's not his fault. He didn't mean it. I'm all right. . . ."

I could see into the depths of all their souls. Irina had it in her mind to kill me. If not now, then later. Anthrus felt himself a cuckold, in spirit if not in fact. Irina's lust for murder evoked in him a sexual excitement. Yuri was both disgusted

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and afraid, but she also felt pity. Cilix thought of me as a disease without a cure and he wondered how best to isolate me. And Jil. . . .

Jil loved me. I knew it as an irrevocable truth. And I had the answer to a question I had once asked a painting: When you look into someone else's soul, you feel despair.

* * *

The walls were bare. The light was minimal. The bed was hard. The floor was cold. Jil and I were hiding. Part of myself wanted her to leave and another part wanted her to stay. So I did nothing. I didn't know what I wanted.

Irina had known she couldn't kill me. The surrogate would sense it first. So, faced with an opponent who would know her every move in advance, she had made the most logical one. The authorities in Port City don't take kindly to spacers wandering about with dangerous life forms, carrying deadly infections. The lizard qualified as both. As she had reported us, we had fled.

They wouldn't look too hard for me. As long as there was no real danger of a spreading of infection, they would be content to look the other way, as they had done with John. At best it was a clear-cut case of violation of quarantine. But Irina had made a formal complaint. The police would have to make at least a token effort to arrest me.

Because of me, Jil too was technically a fugitive. She had sold the remainder of her paintings. Except the one. It was propped up in the corner where she slept now, curled up like a wounded kitten. She sometimes stared at it for hours.

I didn't know which of us looked the worst. Poor Jil was emaciated, bruised and battered. And I was afraid to look into a mirror. I didn't want to know.

It seemed that I could not control my rages. The surrogate wanted to be rid of Jil. In my more lucid moments I screamed, I cried, I pleaded with her to leave me. But she refused. The surrogate and I both knew that it was useless. So I sank back into an apathetic daze.

From time to time Cilix and Yuri would stop by to bring us food. Yuri would sit with Jil, trying to console her, to talk some sense into her. Cilix never said anything. But then, he didn't have to.

The surrogate and I were beginning to arrive at a harmony of sorts. I no longer suffered chills or bouts of nausea after the visions. I grew accustomed to the pain and I was no longer bothered by the stench that emanated from my body. Somehow I felt that John had handled it all better. I couldn't find the strength to fight it, or the will, so I just lay there helplessly, trying to accept the situation. Deep down inside I couldn't. But I tried not to think about that. There was nothing I could do. Someday, maybe soon, I would die . . . and then I would be free.

But the surrogate was not content.

Day by day it struggled for control of my persona.

Do you want to be like John?

I am like John.

You're different.

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I'm the same.

You won't accept me.

Have I got a choice?

I want you to be functional. Not like John. He was an empty vessel.

I had to laugh. It wanted me to be functional. Not like John. Playing gypsy wasn't good enough for me. No, I was meant for some loftier purpose. The surrogate was practicing upward mobility.

I can't think for you all the time. It's tiring.

What do you want from me?

Accept me.

Leave Jil alone. Stop hurting her.

I felt a drop of moisture on my cheek and opened my eyes. Jil was looking down at me. She was crying.

"I can't bear what it's doing to you."

I sighed. I felt very tired. "Go away, Jil. Please. There's nothing you can do."

She shook her head. "There must be something!"

"Kill me."

"I've thought of that."

"I know."

"Yes. I know you know. *It* knows. It knows that I can't do it, too. It hates me."

"*I* hate you, Jil. Go away."

"You're lying!"

"Have it your way."

"You love me. I know you love me."

"You're being used, Jil. I'm using you just like this thing is using me. Can't you see that? Look at us. We're like Anthrus and Irina. Please, Jil. I don't want to live off your grief. I don't want to use you."

"No! No! No one is using me. I won't allow myself to be used."

"Jil—"

"*Listen* to me. You're not using me. You can't. You won't. You could have used Irina. She wanted you to but you wouldn't. You could have used John, to get back at Anthrus for what he put you through. But you didn't."

She kneeled at my feet, holding on to my knees, resting her head upon them, a Juliet mourning her catatonic Romeo.

"I can't fight the creature for you. I would if I could. You have to fight it for yourself."

"I can't, Jil. I need it."

"It needs you!"

"I'm not free, Jil."

"You're wrong. You are, you just don't see it."

I was too tired to argue. But not too tired to beat her again that night. The surrogate gave me strength. My nightmare was the morning.

All night I had visions of the Zharii. The masquerading monsters. The fiends that only surrogates could tame. Again I saw them decimate the Terrans. Only this time I was shown the retribution.

I saw the Zharii slaughtered by the thousands. And the lizards along with them. My night was one vast sea of blood. I saw the seared and blackened yellow reptiles twitching in their death throes and I heard the high-pitched squeal of their agony. I felt my own flesh burning, crackling, crisping. I choked and gagged on the acrid-smelling smoke. I retched as all my inner senses were assailed by the massive spectacle of death. I came to screaming. Jil couldn't hear me.

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I had bludgeoned her unconscious with the painting of John.

* * *

I don't remember leaving. There was money in my pocket. I don't know where I got it. I ate a hearty meal for the first time in what seemed like years. The surrogate was hidden underneath my jacket. I had washed, though I could not remember washing. I was still a pretty miserable spectacle but at least I had the energy to walk and I didn't smell as bad as before.

Much of my mind was blank. I simply wasn't thinking. I walked in a daze, dimly aware of taking one step at a time, vaguely knowing that I had a destination, yet not knowing what it was. I had left Jil lying in a crumpled heap on the floor. Her painting was ruined. But she'd be all right. She wasn't dead—perhaps because I still had a spark of my old self within me—but she would never look the same again. I ran. I ran because I didn't want to kill her.

The spaceport loomed before me. I entered through its massive gate.

There would always be work for a paramed-rated phase-shift navigator. I had wanted to raise some hell. Well, I had found hell. It must have been painfully obvious. Although there were plenty of berths for a man of my special talents, I couldn't seem to find one.

In spite of all the pains I had taken to make myself appear presentable, I still looked like a corpse. Captains have a tendency to be a bit particular as regards the physical health and emotional stability of their phase-shift navigators. It wouldn't do to find a way into Superspace and not be able to locate an exit. I must have looked like a bad bet. I really can't say that I blamed them. I had exhausted almost all the possibilities by the end of the day. I still had one chance left and I was not crazy about it! There were those who didn't mind employing the services of the flotsam and jetsam of space. The Lhari.

I had never been a mercenary and I once swore that I would never sink so low. But I had sunk a lot lower than I had thought was possible. I had to get away. And there didn't seem to be any other choice.

As I waited to see the Lhari commander, I thought about the future. If I played my cards right, there was a chance that my habit might escape detection. How long had John been able to keep his surrogate a secret? I had no way of knowing. At any rate, I would jump ship at the earliest opportunity. Perhaps I'd be lucky enough to find my way to a deserted planetoid where I could hide until they gave up searching and then I could live out the remainder of my days in peaceful solitude. Peaceful? No. I didn't think the lizard would ever allow me any peace.

I was finally admitted into the presence of His Excellency Lord Commander Hhargoth. My papers were in order. He had condescended to see me. I took a deep breath and followed his lieutenant, who ill concealed his distaste at dealing with a Terran. And a poor specimen at that.

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The ceiling of the office was high to allow for the height of the Lhari. Even sitting down, Lord Commander Hhargoth dwarfed me. The red-flecked yellow pupils watched me with an expectant gaze. I hesitated before managing a salute, Lhari-style—closed fist extended, then opened to display an empty hand. His Excellency seemed satisfied with that. He grunted, gave me a curt nod and proceeded to peruse my papers.

He was frowning. It wasn't a good sign.

"Is something wrong, Your Excellency?"

He looked up slowly. "These are *your* papers?"

It was simple enough to check. He knew that as well as I did. The question was rhetorical.

"If they are forgeries, they are very good ones," he said, his eyes not leaving me for an instant.

I still did not reply. He was baiting me. My appearance was, of course, the reason. The man standing in front of him could hardly be the navigator documented in the records.

He obviously suspected narcotics of some sort. He was looking at my neck. The high collar of my jacket did not quite hide the scars. I saw his breathing quicken.

"Remove your jacket."

"Forget it, Excellency. If you'll just let me have my papers, I'll be—"

"Remove your jacket!"

I thumbed it open. Moving with uncanny speed, the lizard leaped!

Hhargoth was even faster. He was on his feet and reaching for his sidearm split seconds before the creature landed on his desk. He rushed his first shot and missed, demolishing the heavy quartzite desk. The surrogate realized its error and jumped back at me. It dug into my arm and I was off and running. White pain exploded deep in my brain!

I never faltered. I charged headlong into the lieutenant, bowling him over, and kept right on going. I breathed with gasping sobs, knocking into people as I ran. I didn't stop until I was nearly a meter from the spaceport gate. My wind was gone. I stumbled heavily, regained my balance and lurched away into the crowd, wheezing like an asthmatic. I was being stared at. I reached for the wall of a building to steady myself . . . and fell. There had been nothing to reach with! My left arm was gone. Gone from the shoulder down. I stared in disbelief at the charred and crispy flesh.

"Oh, God. Dear God, why me?"

My vision blurred. I scrambled up and stumbled on. I found a quiet alleyway and there, surrounded by gray walls, I sank to the ground and cursed the day I was born. I felt feverish. Again I reached with my left hand to wipe the sweat from my forehead and nothing happened. Uncontrollably I began to giggle. I stuffed my remaining fist into my mouth to choke off the hysterics. I was cold. Very cold. I couldn't keep from shaking. And I was sweating too.

My demon was clinging to my leg. It had been badly frightened. Its eyes were wide and it was twitching its tail nervously from side to side. Its plot had backfired.

Belatedly I realized that running

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had never been my idea in the first place. I had only acted as the lizard had intended. Like a chessmaster, it had plotted out its moves and I had accepted every gambit. It hadn't worked with John or with that other nameless crewman because they were only pawns. But as a navigator, I could have been a bishop. Right up there with the king. A phase-shift navigator works in close proximity with the commander of his ship. And the lizard needed a commander. And not just any commander, but one who did not give a damn about the quarantine. One whose homeworld's power placed him just a bit outside the law.

I had had to go through physical depravity so that no other crew would take me. Through me, the lizard almost had its Lhari. I would have been abandoned, left to die, and the lizard would be surrogate to the captain of a ship. The implications were too terrible to dwell on.

The light was fading fast now. I did not have the energy to move. I wanted to sleep but was afraid to close my eyes. I might never open them again. How had Hhargoth known? If they ignored the quarantine, then perhaps my surrogate was not the only one. . . .

There was a silhouette at the entrance to the alley. Someone had stopped and was standing there, hesitant. I scuttled like a lobster, creeping farther back into the darkness. The silhouette came closer. Whoever it was, he was moving erratically as though drunk. It looked too short to be a Lhari. And when it called my name, I whimpered.

It was Jil.

Words alone cannot describe the way she looked. I crawled away from her like an insect, until there was no further place to crawl. And there I huddled like a baby, my arm covering my head, my legs drawn up beneath me. That's how she found me, calling for my mother.

"Why did you go? Why did you leave me, why?"

I threw myself upon her and cried. I held on to her as though she were the last reality in the universe. She held me, cradled me and stroked my hair. And then she saw the ugly wound of my left arm. Her feline howl of anguish was heart-rending.

Gently, slowly, she helped me peel off my jacket. The material at the shoulder had been melded with the flesh and it came away reluctantly. She wrapped the jacket around me and held me as I shivered. The night was quiet. Almost. A long way off, I heard somebody scream. Then I felt a movement. The surrogate was climbing up my leg. I groaned. Perhaps it wasn't really very hungry. I had nothing left to give.

Jil released me, sighing heavily. For the first time she spoke directly to the creature.

"No," she pleaded softly. "He's hurt. He can't. You'll kill him. Please. Take me."

And she held out her hand.

The lizard halted. It turned and looked at her . . . and it made a decision. It crawled onto her hand and started to climb up her arm.

Even now I don't know what possessed me. I don't know where I found the strength. With my right hand I swiped at it and knocked it

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from her arm. And then I lunged. I dove upon it. I grabbed its hindquarters with my fingers and I roared and I dug my teeth into its neck.

There was a great buzzing in my ears. The creature squealed and thrashed between my jaws and I bit down with all the strength that I could muster. Cold blood spurted into my mouth. I gagged but I did not let go. I was like an animal goaded into a frenzy that it could not control. I growled and shook my head, tearing at the flesh. Chunks of it came away and I had swallowed half of the cold body before the lizard was dead.

I lifted up my head, my jaws agape.

Jil fainted.

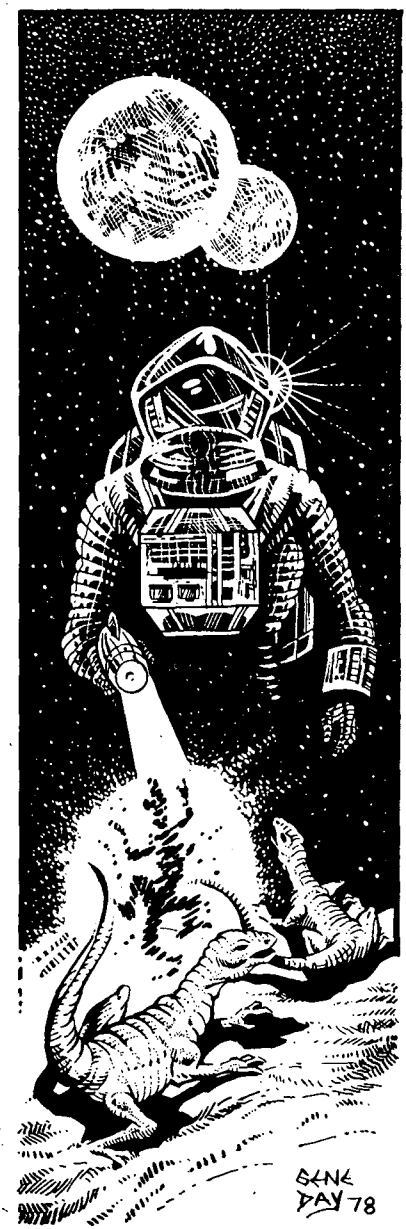
* * *

I was different then. I had wanted to raise some hell. It was an exciting city. The new Rome to which all space routes led. But like the original Rome of primordial times, this new Rome had its share of decadence and desolation. I had been attracted by the decadence. What I found instead was something else entirely.

Jil is with me now. I'm feeling better and I'm working. Working hard. We have much to live for and there's much to do.

Anthrus had been right about one thing: It was an experience that I'll remember. As the surrogate had said, nobody really wants to hear the truth when lies are so much more attractive. I had learned the truth about myself.

And I survived. ★



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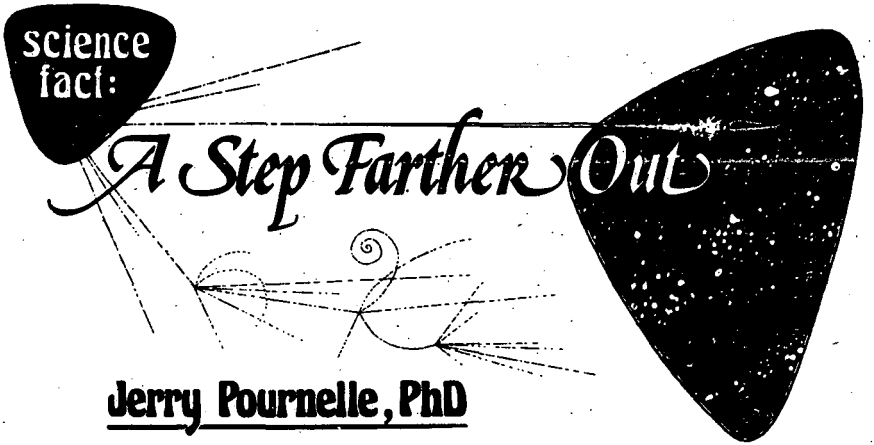

Jerry Pournelle, PhD

THE INEVITABLE REVOLUTION

YOU COMMONLY HEAR the expression: "It blew my mind." Generally what's then described is rather prosaic. Hyperbole is a chronic disease of this decade.

Thus, though I'm tempted, I won't start this column with that trite phrase—but I have had a thought-provoking experience. I've just come back from the National Computing Convention.

Set the scene: we have driven to Anaheim in Orange County. We expect traffic: we have to go past Disneyland. But the traffic moves nicely past Disney's fantasy world, and gets jammed up a couple of blocks further on as we continue toward the Anaheim convention center.

Surely, thought I, this can't be traffic for the computer convention. A *computer* convention? But it was. Over 25,000 people, some in business suits, some in typical California garb, some in robes or other exotic wear; the Convention Center parking lot full, with overflow directed to Disneyland; half-hour and longer lines for registration; and still they poured in.

I gave up and went to the press room, not unwilling to pay, but entirely unwilling to stand in the lines. One finds science fiction readers everywhere—one of the nice young ladies at the press registration desk reads the column. I got a press badge and fought my way toward the exhibit rooms.

Rooms. Here is one of the world's largest exhibition halls—and it is filled, so that many of the biggest names in computing (DEC for example) are out in the garage—and still there was overflow, so that the personal computing exhibits were half a mile away at the Disneyland Hotel.

The exhibition halls were packed. Jammed with people and with computers. *Everyone* has got into the business. All the giants, of course, but thousands of others, some of which you've heard of; others familiar, but not in

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computers—did you know that Ball Brothers, which make jars for home canning, is one of the biggest management consulting firms around, and also heavily into electronics and computers? And the others just coming up.

There were business systems ranging from a few thousand dollars through "low-cost mainframes" in the hundred- thousand-dollar bracket to IBM's marvels. There were robots (disappointingly controlled by hidden operators) and mechanical mice. But mostly there were computing capabilities for sale.

Thousands of firms, each selling equipment that five years ago didn't exist in the most sophisticated laboratories on Earth, and all worried because their expensive equipment is likely to be obsolete in a few months.

I've already mentioned that I do my work on a computer system now. I am typing this onto a TV-like screen, and if I make a mistake I simply backspace and type over it. The other day I tried to use my old reliable IBM Selectric 2 and gave up in disgust; I'm spoiled. My own system was not cheap, but within a few years all but one part of it will be affordable by nearly anyone. The exception is the typewriter that produces the text once I'm finished—and at the NCC I saw a line printer that's faster than my Diablo and costs about $500, a price that's sure to fall.

In the fifties I got interested in computers, largely from science fiction stories; and when I was given an opportunity to visit the ILIAC, then the world's most powerful machine, I hitch-hiked (a bigger deal in those days than now) five hundred miles or so as quickly as possible.

ILIAC was huge. It nearly filled the gymnasium that housed it. Bank upon bank of vacuum tubes, with the world's largest air-conditioning system running full time to keep it happy. Because tubes could burn out while it considered its problems, each computation was done three times, and a majority vote taken to determine the accepted answer.

Three undergraduates ran about within the vitals of this machine. They pushed shopping carts full of vacuum tubes, and they spent their time replacing burned-out items.

I have on my desk a calculator more powerful than ILIAC was. My son carries another on his belt, bought, I think, for $60 a year ago, and probably available for half that now. Sure, it was 25 years ago that I visited ILIAC: but in that 25 years there has been a revolution. ANYONE can afford more computing power than was available to the wealthiest organization in the world (the U.S. government) in ILIAC's day.

Which is why I am confident that within a decade or less every one of my readers will have computers far better than the one I'm writing this on.

A revolution. Where does it lead?

Well, first to a complete restructuring of the publishing industry. This isn't something that will take twenty years; the equipment exists today. The only

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missing items are cheap mass-channel communications and business expertise.

The space Shuttle will take care of the communications. Within five years, the Shuttle will have put up enough relay satellites to have open several million simultaneous personal communications channels; the two-way wrist radio and the pocket telephone will almost certainly be common well before the end of the 80's. In fact, the biggest problem at the moment is the billing system: how do the investors recover their money? Keeping records of telephone use and billing accounts costs about as much as operating the system right now; with millions of micro-wave linked satellite-relayed channels the record keeping becomes impossible.

Thus the entire philosophy of telephonic communications billing—pay for time and distance of communication actually used—will have to be changed, probably in favor of a flat monthly billing charge. There may be an attempt at statistical sampling to determine base billing rates so that those who use their telephones the most will pay the most, but implementation of that isn't cheap either. We feel that use charges are more fair than flat rates averaged among everyone: but if the use charges themselves raise rates for everyone, then they aren't fair at all.

So—assume that communication unlimited by time and (within the continent anyway) distance will be available at nominal cost.

You've all seen the Radio Shack computer systems: $600 for their basic unit, which I admit isn't very versatile (although its biggest defect is its incompatibility with anything else; same problem as Heathkit's system). The Radio Shack system includes alphabetic capabilities and an input keyboard.

I note that Ball is selling something very similar, and there are a number of other small computer systems with word-handling capabilities for under a thousand dollars; and these are first-generation mass-market items. Texas Instruments hasn't made its move yet, nor have some of the other giants in pocket calculators, although by the time this is published TI may have some spectacular items for sale. It will still all be first-generation pricing—my TI SR-50 cost me $150 when it first came out, and now I can buy a better calculator with logs and trig and exponential notation for about $15—and the prices may be expected to tumble by half and better as the competition gets into the act.

Present-day systems are somewhat memory limited: mine can get the text editor and about 5,000 words of text into its memory and I have about as elaborate a micro-computer as you can buy; but that too will change. Bubble memory, which stores information as tiny magnetic bubbles; charge-coupled devices; cheap disk systems; there are a number of innovations on the market that will allow storage of a million or so words in a box smaller than a peach crate and requiring no more electricity than a light bulb. These will come along in the next two or three years at most. The personal

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computer you'll have before 1985 will be to mine as mine is to the old ILIAC.

And that is the end of the publishing industry as we know it.

Consider: at the moment I write a book in machine-readable form. I massage the text with all kinds of special features (inserting words, lines, paragraphs, etc; deleting blocks of text and moving other blocks around; correcting spellings; etc.) until I am happy with it—at which point the Diablo types it off onto paper, which is mailed to New York where my editor reads it and sends it off to a composer who re-types it into machine-readable form and sends that to another automatic typing device which makes a camera-ready copy which is then offset printed. The result is bound into a book which is transported across country to warehouses; the boxes of books are (I hope) opened and put onto trucks and carried into book stores, drug stores, etc., where (I more fervently hope) people buy them.

A very vulnerable process. Certainly it will not be long before the text is transmitted to my editors as electronic beeps and read by the editor on a screen like mine; this will greatly simplify the editing job and completely eliminate typesetter errors.

But note this: sure, some readers are collectors, and want the actual physical book; but a great deal of material published has no value except as information, and keeping the physical book is a chore rather than a pleasure. Couldn't the information (and entertainment value, etc.) be transferred without all that printing and carrying of heavy objects?

And it's clear that it can. I could write my books on my machine, and for a small charge deposit them into a national data bank; access to this would be by credit-card code, and those who want to read the book get it fed into their home (and eventually pocket) TV-like screen. A charge goes from their bank account to mine—and where does the publisher fit into the picture?

Of course there will then be such a plethora of books—anyone can "publish" under this arrangement—that the readers will be utterly unable to keep up. Thus there is a need for good reviewers, and editors will very likely remain—people like John Campbell and Bob Gleason and Jim Baen do more than select books; they help authors considerably in their creation. There is not, though, much need for the publisher as he exists today.

Note also that schools and other public institutions are likely to be among the first to have the new electronic "books," so that a very large chunk of the publishing industry activity is affected rather quickly.

All right. That's an easily predictable effect of the electronics revolution. What else?

All major political philosophies, both "liberal" and "conservative," were formed at a time when "classes" were inevitable. There was simply no possibility that all the world's population could be wealthy. The latest of the major philosophies, Marxism, where it is

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original (much of Marx has roots in Plato) was forged in a time when the industrial revolution made possible a "middle class," but when it was still thought impossible that that class would be large.

In Marx's day wealth consisted of: enough to eat; changes of clothing; opportunities for travel; several hours leisure per day (leisure being defined as time to do what one liked, whether reading or drinking or gambling or studying or going fishing); and access to education for one's children. Dentistry and medicine were so primitive that the wealthiest kings did not expect, in Marx's day, to be comfortable or have teeth past the age of 50.

Under those terms nearly everyone in the United States is wealthy: anyone can travel, the poorest have some change of clothing available, and if you starve it's your election: at the worst the Salvation Army will feed you for the cost of a lecture. Everyone has leisure today: no one works 12 hours a day because he has to.

Moreover, there are opportunities and capabilities not dreamed of in Aristotle's time when the non-Marxist political ideas were framed.

The electronic revolution makes this more evident. Consider data banks and information. At the moment public libraries do have a great deal of information available freely to anyone who cares to visit them; electronics will extend that to be more convenient. But extrapolate from that: is it not obvious that government could provide an enormous pool of information made freely available to its citizens? The late David MacDaniel postulated something of the sort in his story "Prognosis: Terminal" (2020 VISION, ed. by J. E. Pournelle, Avon 1972) and the capabilities are much greater now than he had predicted for the year 2020.

Greg Benford, in his *In the Ocean of Night*, has medical electronics that allow physicians to watch over their patients as they go about their daily business; so does Steve Robinett in "The Man Responsible." Neither capability is technologically impossible with present-day equipment.

The point is that we may see a vast expansion of potential services, many of which can most conveniently be provided by some kind of public organization; and at the same time most of us have learned to distrust "government" and almost everyone, liberal or conservative, wants to see government limited. Fine, say the Libertarians: let private organizations set up the information utilities and services.

Unfortunately it isn't that simple. It's like the personal telephones with satellite relays: the cost is not high on a government scale (a couple of billion dollars for the information network, plus perhaps fifty bucks each for the telephones themselves) but it certainly is more than most industries can invest—because who is going to pay them back?

Ditto in spades for an information utility. To create and maintain an enormous data base requires that it be available to nearly everyone: restricting the users to any small

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number would cost each user too much to make it worthwhile. But if you open the lines to everyone or nearly so, then how do you keep those who haven't paid from using it? The record keeping and billing would cost a good bit more than the information service itself.

We have thus a kind of tragedy of the commons: if you don't have to pay the subscription fee a lot of users won't pay. This is not only unfair to those who do, but also a powerful disincentive to setting the system up in the first place. Operators of subscriber-supported radio and TV stations are perpetually having to conduct fund drives and auctions and the like, and most barely survive; yet they need a very small amount compared to the costs of an information utility.

The advantages of public data banks, and information/communication utilities for "publishing" and the like, are obvious. The disadvantages of giving anything that big to traditional government are also obvious, while the difficulties of persuading private investors into putting money in enterprises almost guaranteed not to be able to collect for their services are not small.

Thus the electronics revolution should lead to the search for something that is neither government nor private; a new kind of organizational structure, with new methods of making it responsible (in the original meaning of the term) to its users.

There's more we can predict with confidence.

For example, the implanted computers my characters wear in my Aeneas MacKenzie series are likely to be available well before the end of the century. In my stories I postulate that they are available only to the very wealthy, but in fact I suspect they won't cost much more than my computer has cost me.

By implant, I mean a system that lets the owner think directly into his computer: ask questions by thinking them, and get answers fed into his auditory nerves so that he "hears" them. The system can connect to a national data base, so that any question can instantly be answered.

Consider that: any question (provided the answer is known), any calculation; any piece of data the user wants is instantly available. What does that do to "education" as we know it? Certainly students will have to be taught a minimum of factual information and mathematical principles—but just how much is needed if you have a vast library and computation system available by thinking the questions?

The implications for government are not small here, either. Court records and police files can be available instantly to probation and sentencing officers, and to detectives. European nations, particularly France, have for decades kept track of where everyone is: citizen or foreigner, if you stay in a French hotel the police in Paris get a card notifying them of it.

So far that hasn't been all that useful; there's too much information, and it is not often used. The electronics revolution would change all that. It will soon

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be quite possible to keep track of everyone; where they are, whom they meet with, etc. It's a frightening capability and moreover one not necessarily limited to governments. A primitive "paper trail" of your purchases and payments already exists in credit-card files and credit-rating data banks.

How shall we control that? Or can we at all?

George Orwell notes in *Down and out in Paris and London* that the English are willing to put up with much higher crime rates than the French, because the English are unwilling to give police and government the kinds of powers routinely used by the French. (This may well have changed in England since Orwell's time.) The increasing wealth of the nation and the vast increase in purchasing power available even to the poorest rather dramatically demonstrates that crime is not caused by "poverty"; most criminals don't know what real poverty is. Thus we have no great hope that even if we go to space and chattel goods become very cheap and very widespread the crime rates will drop.

The government's ability to take measures to deal with crime will increase with wealth and cheap electronics; is anyone giving any thought on how we should use that capability, and how we should limit government's powers? It's high time we did; never has any potential problem been more easily predicted.

There's more yet.

Beyond the implant is the computer interface that bypasses the peripherals and feeds information direct: not as words, but as direct memory into the brain. It is not impossible. The brain is an informative-processing system, and uses an internal code. That code can be solved.

It's probably true that each person has a different code; this may be why telepathy is so notoriously unreliable (and why identical twins seem to have the ability to communicate with each other in ways others have not). But suppose everyone does have a different code: electronics are cheap, and a personal computer can learn to understand my code if not yours; my computer can talk to your computer; and the information transfer rate can be enormous, thousands of times faster than the present system of speech or words on paper.

We may well see such systems within my lifetime. We will almost certainly see them within the lifetimes of most of my readers. Consider: an ability to do calculus squirted into your head within a few minutes, followed by intensive exercises to make you aware of your new knowledge. This might take as much as two weeks: at present calculus is a year or more at most engineering colleges.

Ditto with physics, foreign languages, much of biology. Languages should be particularly amenable to such techniques, as learning them involves no unfamiliar concepts at all, only a new way of expressing what you already know.

What does all this do to the education establishment?

Now it's true that science fiction

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has been dealing with these concepts for a long time. Computer translators, data banks, personal dossiers instantly available to the police, and other such concepts have been in our stories for decades; but I think most SF writers would be the first to admit that they haven't really thought through the implications.

We have very few stories on what it would really be like to live in a world in which there are no "poor" and no one is required through economic necessity to take a job he doesn't care for.

Of course there's Huxley's *Brave New World* as well as Orwell's *1984*, and Williamson's *Humanoids* series, but our speculations have largely been superficial.

Yet they're the best we have. Science fiction may not be adequate as a description of the real future, but it provides marvels of insight compared to most of the products of academic social "science."

We could also go the other way: give up research and development, cancel the space program, go toward "Small Is Beautiful" and "Appropriate Technology," which is to say labor-intensive systems. We could spiral slowly into the world I have described in some of my stories, a world in which there are technological marvels, but they are not used to make the population wealthy; a world in which there is very little economic slack so that investment is difficult or impossible.

Or the more frightening world in which new technology is used to stifle new developments; in which

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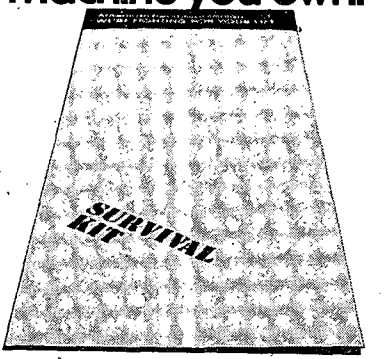

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the benefits of technology are kept for the governing class, and new inventions are used exclusively by government or suppressed altogether.

That too is possible; because while we have some control over who shall use the new computer technologies, we have none at all over whether they will exist.

They're already with us. Not in their full-blown state, of course: we can't even use what we have. I looked at a dozen programs for small business record-keeping systems and none of them produced books I could have got my accountant to sign without getting her dead drunk first. But these are temporary abberations—in my case I solved the problem by writing my own programs to produce standard books of the kinds described in college accounting texts rather than the "special reports" so beloved by computer programmers.

True: computers sometimes do ridiculous things. They send checks for a million dollars to someone expecting ninety cents. We can all laugh at these incidents and feel secure because we wouldn't be so stupid as to do that.

But that won't stop the machines. Their capabilities increase hourly, and their price falls yearly.

A favorite game of historians is to try to determine exactly when some great event became inevitable: what trivial happening marked the true beginning of the French Revolution, or World War I, or the Thirty Years War.

It is a game because no one can be certain. Events wend on, and their trends are not seen; suddenly it is apparent that there is a trend, and that the world is due for inevitable changes.

When the Archduke was shot at Sarajevo the assassination triggered events that historians now think may have been inevitable; yet few suspected the Great War was coming even then.

In August when the armies marched some still thought it would be over in a few weeks; that the Great War would be similar to the lightning campaigns of the Austro-Prussian and Franco-Prussian wars, and this despite the terrible example of the American Civil War.

By the following spring it was obvious to everyone: the world of 1915 was not the world of 1912. Everything was different, and nothing could revive the past.

As I walked through the exhibit halls of the National Computing Convention I had the same experience: there is no chance that a world with those capabilities at those prices will be a lot like that of 1968.

I don't know which way it will go. I like to think we have considerable control over events yet.

We can use the new capabilities to expand our opportunities, to create what I call real freedoms, namely choices we can really exercise; or we can watch while the new capabilities are absorbed into traditional structures never designed to cope with them.

Whatever we decide, the revolution is upon us. The one thing we can't do is put the djinn back in the bottle. ★

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UNEMPLOYMENT PROBLEM

BY JOR JENNINGS

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Being unemployed is never pleasant. But sometimes it's an opportunity, if you know how to take it!

THE REST ARE DEAD. I'm all alone, sitting by the radio half the twenty-one hour day, listening to static while I wonder if that automatic beacon is still beaming its SOS into space. There must be some way you can tell if it's working. But then if it isn't, I couldn't fix it anyway. My job on the spaceship didn't exactly prepare me for being the last survivor on an alien world. I was the ship's whore.

Or sex therapist, if you want my official title. That's not what our captain called me, though. A sex therapist is the one officer most vital to the success of a standard ten-year space exploration mission, they told me when I went in to see what jobs were available. You might say it's the malamute on the dogteam that keeps the huskies pulling together instead of fighting. Now this malamute is fresh out of huskies. I've got no one left to do my job on. And I can't even tell if the goddamn radio is working.

Outside the dome the air is breathable, if you don't mind string things growing in your lungs. String things are long, white threads that wriggle and shrink up when you touch them. Or rather, when whoever dissects you, to find out why you died, touches them. Lenny and Mack died from string things, after coughing and gasping for a week. Bryce, who did the dissection although he was dying himself from the gangrene in his broken leg, said the string things were a motile fungoid that grew from inhaled spores. He guessed they put out fruiting bodies—mushrooms—on the corpses of their victims. We didn't keep Lenny and Mack around long enough to find out.

And the others? Well, after the ship was holed, Rich (our captain) and Fred (communications and computer technician) went down in the lander to reconnoiter. They never came back. Spaceships aren't supposed to land on planets, but by that time we didn't have a choice. C.C. was lucky. He died in the crash. Bryce got his leg mashed and, being ship's surgeon, he ignored the infection until it was too late. Lew was eaten by something that leaves webbed footprints a meter long. Webfoot upchucked him later, but that didn't help Lew any. All they ever found of Hugo was his beret floating on a bottomless mud puddle. Kris came down with fever, broke out in purple pustules, ran screaming into the rain. Mel was the last to go. He died in his sleep. I wish I could have figured out why, but my residency was in psychiatry.

Luckily, I don't get involved with people. That's one reason I'm good

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at my job. A ship's whore can't start playing favorites, not on a ten-year exploratory cruise. So it's not that I'm particularly bothered by anyone's death, or the nasty ways they picked to die. I just wish I had somebody around who could tell me if the funny rumble in the air filter is anything serious.

It occurs to me that rationing out coffee to myself may represent a ridiculous overindulgence in optimism. Will I be here tomorrow to enjoy the coffee I save today? I do have a permanent food supply, assuming the algae tanks don't go bad on me. For as long as I'm here I'll have plenty of green goop to bake, boil or fry, as I like. The only way I really like it is fried out in paper-thin pancakes, with lots of raspberry jam. I was eating raspberry jam like there was no tomorrow; then suddenly it was tomorrow, and no more raspberry jam. The chocolate's almost gone, too. I'm saving what's left for emergencies. The coffee supply is in better shape. If I limit myself to two cups a day it will last a year. By limiting myself to two cups a day, I assume I'll last a year. Assuming that is good for my morale. I can hold out until rescue comes.

Or maybe it means I won't be rescued for a year. If I'm rescued at all. If the transmitter is still working. Worrying about the coffee starts me worrying about other things as well. Maybe I should adopt a "live for today and let the devil take tomorrow" attitude. Or, I could make a list of all the reasons for and against rationing coffee and see which side has the most reasons. Not all reasons are equally good, though. I could score the reasons one through five and add up the numbers. Words are such slippery things, I always feel much more secure with the results when I can reduce my sentences to numbers and treat them mathematically. There's safety in numbers, as Mother always used to say (in a slightly different context).

Or maybe I could limit myself to four cups a day, and plan on lasting six months. Or three cups and nine months. Or make the coffee half strength, and... Decisions, decisions! Anyway, it gives me something to think about.

All day I feel safe in the fiberglass dome the men set up around our wrecked spaceship. The flare of the afterburners must have sterilized the soil, for no new plants have grown up inside this charmed circle. Outside the dome the jungle presses in. Shadow of branches wave across the milk-white triangles. Shadow vines grow up the dome's sides, putting out more shadows I like to think are flowers. Now and then something nut-like bounces off the dome. Sometimes little animals scamper across it. Nothing gets through. All day I feel sure that even Webfoot could not penetrate the dome.

At night I'm not so sure. Once the light goes, nuts crash against the dome with the force of missiles hurled to pierce it. The scampering animals are no longer squirrels in my mind—they're vampire bats. The strange rumble in the air filter begins to sound like an incipient failure. Then I go into the ship, pile boxes against the jagged hole that serves as doorway (the ship is lying

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on its airlock), and read until I fall asleep with the light on.

I'm reading the Great Books in order from A to Z, no cheating allowed. Most of them are quite dull, actually, so I just skim them. That's why I'm already to the M's. If I ever get out of this alive, boy, am I going to have culture!

There are windows in the dome, triangles of clear plastic. Lichen-like plants have grown over them, making Jack Frost patterns in orange, turquoise and violet. Mel went out in full protective clothing to scrape them off, on the last day of his life. I sure wish I knew what he died of. Since then the lichens have grown back and now I can't see out anymore. Not that there was ever much to see; just masses of slimy black branches dripping with thick ropes of spaghetti, most of it toadstool—white powdered here and there with tints of copper or blue-green as though it had bread mold. Sometimes there were great thrashings in the vegetation. Was Webfoot plowing through it? I never saw what was making the commotion. Now I can't see out at all. Maybe it's just as well. If I could see out, I would probably stare out the window all day, waiting for something to happen. As it is, I keep busy. Reading Great Books. And I'm making a flower garden.

No, I'm not growing plants from seed. I wish I did have flower seeds—and a green thumb to go with them! I don't have either one. I'm making flowers out of wire and scrap metal that I weld together with a laser torch. The tulips and daffodils came out the best. So far my peonies have all been failures, but I keep trying.

There are fresh mounds of dirt in my flower garden. Has some gigantic gopher invaded the charmed circle of my dome? The possibility worries me. Not that the intruder might eat my metal flowers, or even me! I worry about diseases the creature might bring in with it. It looks like I'll have to stay up tonight and try to catch the thing.

* * *

I didn't have to wait long. The animal came out of its burrow at dusk and I hit it with a pipe before it knew I was there. Then I hit it again until was so mashed-looking it had to be dead. It's a stocky, tailless, cat-sized creature with stout, heavily clawed forelegs, web-footed hindlegs, and a pair of tiny, almost human arms flanking the wide, lipless mouth on the front end of the body. No neck; it looks like a fish with six legs. Multi-faceted eyes on retractable stalks take the place of turning one's head. One eyestalk had been damaged and was regenerating. The animal's mottled gray skin feels velvety through my surgical gloves, although it has no fur.

As the closest thing to a biological officer our wrecked ship has left, I suppose I should dissect the creature. All I can think of is burying it fast, before it contaminates the dome. I dig a little grave and shove the body in. As I do, a packet falls out of the wide, fishy mouth. I pick up the small, ovoid, chamois-textured bag. Inside, something wriggles.

I can't resist slitting open the

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bag. An infant giant gopher wriggles out. It's ivory, kitten-sized, much like its mother, except it's a lot cuter. Do giant gophers give birth through their mouths, or was this one carrying her eggs one by one to a new nest inside my dome? Both, I decide. Giant gophers have a single, all-purpose orifice that doubles as mouth and cloaca; and one of the burrows in my flower garden contains a second egg, a dead one, in a nest lined with insulation swiped from the spaceship.

Must I kill and bury the baby? I can't bear to, it's much too cute. An animal that's just hatched out must be reasonably disease-free, I assure myself. And it's so warm and deliciously soft to the touch.

What do infant giant gophers eat? Green goop from human algae tanks, I learn. The little fellow eats daintily, scooping up tiny handfuls with its feeding arms and wiping them into its mouth. What else does it need? To be kept warm? I make a home for it in my breast pocket. There it spends most of its time sleeping, with interludes of stretching, wriggling and placid gurgling that mean it's getting hungry again.

I name my pet "Broke." Gopher Broke.

* * *

The windows cleared up overnight. At first I thought the scale died and fell off. Now I see that it's being scraped off as it forms by lava snakes—dull black, rough-textured animals the shape and size of legless alligators. They have divided tails they use for grasping, tiny feeding arms like Broke's on either side of their lipless toothless mouths, and eyestalks like colored golf balls on matching tees.

Every half hour or so a lava snake climbs the vines growing up over the dome and peers in the window, smacking its lips. Or rather, flexing its mouth; lava snakes don't have lips. Why? I wonder. Do lava snakes eat people? Certainly they're big enough. Only there aren't any people on this world for them to practice on. Are there? Maybe they gobbled up Rich and Fred, decided they liked the flavor, and have been looking around for more ever since. More likely, something about the dome makes the lava snakes think it's an egg. A giant egg. And lava snakes are programmed to wait around until giant eggs hatch out, so they can destroy the young Webfoots before they get big enough to destroy the lava snakes.

Either way, I'm safe enough as long as I stay in the dome. I don't think I should go outside, though.

Now that I've figured out what the lava snakes are up to, I wonder what happened to Rich and Fred. They called the ship to say they landed safely. They also said they were going outside to look around. That was the last we heard from them. Do lava snakes think a lander looks like a giant egg?

This is my first space trip, so I really can't judge. A lot of the scientists on board were old space hands, though, and they agreed with me that Rich was being irresponsible. A good captain would stay with his crippled ship, and send someone else down to check out the nearest planet's surface, preferably bio-

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logists and geologists, who know what precautions to take on strange worlds. Not Rich. Bravely he volunteered to lead the landing party himself, and who did he take along with him? A scientist trained in interpreting planetary surfaces? Not Rich. He took his best buddy, the computer repairman! Then, instead of leaving somebody behind to bring back our only intact lander, they both go out together, and promptly disappear! That's our Cap'n Rich for you. No sense, just a lot of mock heroics. And if you think he's a lousy spaceship captain, you should see what he's like in bed.

Oh, he's no great lover, but then, spacemen never are. They make love like they're docking with an orbiting space station. It's what he did afterwards that made Rich unusual. He liked to sit around for ten, fifteen minutes and tell me what a dirty, filthy etc. whore I was. Well, if that's how he felt, I suppose he had to talk about it, and it's my job to listen, no matter how bored I get. Still, I wonder how a man as basically unstable as Rich ever got command of a spaceship.

As for Fred, he made love in the same dull, plodding way he did everything else. After a year or so I stopped faking orgasm to see if he'd notice. He never did. That's Fred for you. I think the real reason Rich liked him so much was that he could be sure he was smarter than Fred. Everyone else aboard ship had at least one doctorate. Not that Fred was really stupid. He was just slow. He had to get off by himself and think for an hour or so before he could commit himself to an answer, even when the question was "How are you?" His answers were bright enough when they finally came. He wasn't exactly quick on the draw, though. He wasn't the sort of man you would take along to explore a new planet with unknown dangers, was he? No. He was the sort of man Captain Rich would take along.

* * *

Broke is really thriving on green goop. He outgrew my breast pocket a week ago, and now rides on my shoulder—in his more sedate moods. In his more usual moods he races ahead of me, climbs up the inside of the dome to the ceiling, and drops into my hair. That's his favorite joke. He has a lot more. His pranks are why I think of Broke as a "he," a mischievous little boy. Actually, I have no idea if the creature is male or female, or if either word applies to the animals on this planet.

Sometimes I'm afraid that Broke will puncture the dome fabric with his sharp little claws and let in the germs. He enjoys his stunts so much I hate to discipline him, though. Besides, I don't know if he would still love me after I spanked him a few times. By which I mean, I suspect that punishment might cause him to develop an avoidance response to me. At the moment, he's really cuddly and affectionate. Maybe that's just because he likes regular meals, getting his tummy scratched, and having an interesting shape to climb on. Whatever it is, I would miss it terribly if Broke started avoiding me. Rather than

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risk that, I risk holing the dome and dying, more or less slowly and horribly, of the alien contagions lurking without.

My security has been broached somewhat already. Every morning, now, I must clean out webs of rainbow-colored silk that have grown during the night. Presumably Broke's mother (father? both?) brought the spores in on her skin, or in her digestive tract. What else did she bring in besides the silk spores, I wonder nervously. It's normal for me to wake up with some congestion. I've done it all my life. The last few days I woke up coughing, as usual, and I was sure I could feel those string things filling up my lungs. It's not so much that I mind dying, it's the idea of my lungs filling up with a tangle of long, white worms that I can't stand. Even though I know they aren't worms, they're motile fungoids, I still can't stand the idea.

As number two medical officer on the ship, I had to help Bryce with the autopsies. And, I mean, I had known Lenny and Mack pretty well, right? And there were those lungs, full of wriggly white things. I had to sit down because I thought I was going to faint, only it turned out I was going to throw up instead. And Bryce made some joke like, "Don't collapse yet! I was just going to ask you to saw off my leg." So I made some joke like, "Didn't I ever tell you I went into psychiatry because I couldn't stand the sight of blood?" And Bryce? Well, he never asked me again. He just died. He died because I failed him. I mean, I could have pulled myself together and amputated his

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leg, if I had known it was necessary. I just didn't know. I failed him. And the worst of it was, it was a failure of communication. That's supposed to be *my* field!

* * *

More and more things are getting into the dome. There are crystal slugs on my copper chrysanthemums, motile macaroni on my titanium tulips. The air is alive with the zing! zing! zing! of flying lobsters. Every morning when I get up I interrupt games of tag and leapfrog played by spacemice, miniature versions of Broke. Finally I discover the reason for the invasion. A neat little Broke-sized hole has been gnawed in the panel behind my flowerbed. I kneel to patch the hole and a lava snake stares in at me, smacking its lips. I apply the patch and look around the dome for more holes. I find eight. Broke has sure been busy.

Now what do I do? Make myself another pot of coffee, I guess. Finish off the chocolate. I'd hate to pass on to my reward with the chocolate uneaten. And read a good book—not a Great Book, just a good one. I won't get to the Z's in the time I have left, so why finish the M's? I give up on Molière and settle down with *Molly Hart and the Pirates of Betelgeuse*.

Three Molly Hart novels later, I'm beginning to wonder what it's like to make love with someone you love. And a related question. What's it like to make love with someone you can stand? No, that's not fair. I could stand them all, even Fred. Even Rich—almost. I could stand them because I put my body on auto-pilot and went off to imagine what I would do with all the money I was making. Buy a ranch and raise Arabian horses, of course, but where? I imagined myself galloping along an alien beach in the multi-colored dawn of a double star while my well-trained body, left behind, faked the customary enthusiasm. Rich was right when he called me a whore. Right for the wrong reasons, perhaps, but right nonetheless.

If I wasn't fair to the guys, they weren't fair to me. Oh, I'm not gorgeous, I know that. I'm about as good-looking, in my way, as the average spaceman is in his. Maybe better. So did they have to sit around and complain all the time about the personnel office's taste in women, and go on complaining, even after I came in, as though I were a piece of hardware, a machine, a robot without feelings? Of course I never told them I had feelings. I guess I thought that was counterindicated by my job description. The ship's therapist should be a sort of god who remains above the psychological messes everyone else gets into on long voyages. Not a young girl fresh out of medical school who knows all the right answers to put on exams, and nothing at all about how people really behave, least of all herself. Who doesn't know what she's doing and refuses to admit it, even to herself. Who is so used to getting A's, she doesn't know how to behave without them. That's what I really needed on that ship! Somebody to give me an A!

Instead, the men were always

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complaining, "At least they could have given us a choice." Yeah, sure. You guys had a choice. You could do it or not, as you liked. I wish I had that much choice, I remember thinking. Yet I did have a choice. I controlled the scheduling. Granted, I couldn't refuse anyone and still do my job. But I could have scheduled an occasional day off, a three day weekend, or a longer vacation, if necessary by pleading mysterious female ailments. Instead, the way I picked to get fixed, I didn't even get five days off a month. And that, boys and girls, is way too much of a good thing.

Oh, I had a choice, all right, and I chose to do my duty. So naturally I got to hate my job, only I didn't realize it, I was too busy pretending I was somewhere else. Not on a spaceship going off to explore unknown worlds circling distant stars. I pretended I was someplace exciting! Now that I'm stuck in this stupid dome waiting to die, with nothing to look at but wired trees dripping with weird plants, and an occasional lava snake smacking its lips, I wish I was back in that spaceship, helping to explore the universe any way I can.

What they really need to do is make bigger spaceships, so everyone will have a place where he or she can be alone. Come to think of it, the guys got off by themselves all the time in the line of duty. The scientists signed up for lab time, and turned on the "experiment in progress" sign so they wouldn't be disturbed. Fred muttered something about "checking the relays" and disappeared in the machinery for hours on end. Rich suited up and went out for space walks, explaining on his return that instruments can't give you a "gut feeling" for your position in space. My job description didn't call for being alone, so about all I could do was hole up in the john, and sit there and read for fifteen or twenty minutes, until somebody started pounding on the door. Now there's nobody left to pound on the door. I'm beginning to miss the guys. After all, our misunderstandings were as much my fault as theirs. I even miss Fred. Give me another week and I'll start missing Rich. Only I don't think I'll have another week. Purple blotches are growing on my skin.

Most of all, I miss Bryce. It would be nice to have another doctor around, to tell me if I'm well or ill or dying. Even if he was wrong, it would be nice to have his opinion. I hate having to make up my own mind.

Broke must have made a really big hole I haven't found yet, for the lava snakes have been getting in. There was one in the garden this morning, smacking its lips at me. Which is to say, it was grinning and then pursing its mouth, over and over. Every lava snake I've caught looking at me has done this. It seems to be a habit of theirs. Too bad Rich and Fred aren't here. They were the lip reading experts aboard ship, always mouthing secret messages to each other that none of the rest of us could understand. I'm sure they would have had all sorts of theories about what the lava snakes were really trying to say.

I gave the lava snake a blast with my welding laser, and it slithered

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off under the ship. Presumably, that's where their hole is. I didn't feel like crawling in after the snake to find out.

* * *

A week has passed, and I'm not dead yet. I'm not even ill, unless you count purple fuzz spreading out over my skin as a disease. Human skin is normally host to colonies of bacteria, which not only don't hurt you, but actually help protect you when the bad germs come along. No man is an island: he's also an ecosystem. Right? Anyway, it looks like the bacteria I brought with me are being replaced by indigenous microbes that do the same job, albeit more colorfully. I guess my gut is also going native; my stools have been coming out blue. And I never felt better in my life!

What gets me is, there's nothing remotely like me in this world. My tiny inhabitants must have evolved just for me. Maybe they were random mutations who happened to find the visiting Earthperson to their liking, and their descendents adapted even more closely to the new—and all too temporary!—ecological niche. Maybe. I like to think the guardian deity of this planet raised those microbes just for me.

And sent Broke to me, carrying pathogens in small enough amounts so that I could develop antibodies before they overwhelmed my existing defenses. At any rate, I have developed antibodies, for whatever reason. My gamma globulin really clobbered some string things I got to hatch out in a petri dish. It's fun, getting into biology again. I haven't done this kind of thing since I was an undergraduate.

The pump in the air filter started smoking, so I tried taking it apart, following the instructions in the technical manuals I found in the ship's library. The filter turned out to be overgrown with eighteen different kinds of organisms—no wonder the poor pump was overworked! I couldn't see any point in cleaning it out, so I spent the day playing biologist instead. It's very interesting. All the stuff in the filter is made from D-series amino acids. Me, I'm made from L-series amino acids, myself, like almost all of Earth's creatures. Including the algae in my algae tanks. Which Broke thrives on. He won't eat the native vegetation. (Hypothesis: Broke is L-series, like me. I would snip off a bit of Broke to test it, if I could be sure he wouldn't misinterpret my motives.) String things, and the purple fuzz growing on my skin, are D-series organisms. If they can live off me, they must be capable of conversion. Why?

As I remember the view from space, this is a world of interconnected continents, pock-marked with big, round, landlocked seas which look like old craters. I'm guessing life evolved here several times, with different forms in different places. What happens when D-series organisms, spreading out across the land from one sea, meet L-series organisms from another sea? I don't know, and I would really like to find out.

The interface between D-series and L-series country can't be too far away, if Broke's parent came on

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foot from beyond it. I could probably find it if I went out and explored around in a systematic manner. If I dared go out and explore.

Molly Hart wouldn't hesitate. She would go right out and explore the whole planet, on foot if she had to. If she couldn't figure out how to turn her wrecked spaceship into a hot air balloon. Sure. It's easy for Molly Hart. She can trust her author not to throw her any bug-eyed monsters she can't tame. As for me, I can handle the lava snakes one at a time with my welding laser. What happens when I step outside the dome and they're all around me? Besides, the battery pack weighs twenty kilograms. If I carry that, I won't be able to carry much in the way of food or camping equipment, and I still wouldn't know if I could discourage something the size of Webfoot. When are they going to invent a pocket raygun with infinite power? Lacking that, I'll put off exploring until it becomes necessary, and plan on spending the rest of the day finding out how and if the SOS beacon works.

* * *

Interesting. The SOS beacon is a coherent beam of visible light with a wavelength chosen to avoid the absorption spectra of hydrogen, ammonia, and other common forms of interstellar gas. It doesn't avoid the absorption spectra of tree branches, but then, spaceships aren't supposed to land on planets, and tree branches aren't a problem in outer space. Not that I suspect the forest canopy of absorbing my distress call. I suspect those dangling hanks of white spaghetti are reflecting it. The receiver dials were left at a setting which—I now understand—picks up light of the standard emergency wavelength and transforms it into an audible signal. The static I've been getting must be my own beacon reflecting erratically from the junk overhead.

Funny. The guys who set up the beacon really should have known better. Maybe it was one of those group decisions where everybody assumes someone else has thought the thing through. And here I thought men always did everything right, at least where machines are concerned. Now I feel better about my own competence. Insofar as it's possible to feel better about letting everyone die.

I can't even say I did my best to save them. In a situation which demanded medical creativity, I played nurse, content to follow orders, just as the men, without Fred to guide them, followed the checklist of emergency procedures, including *4. Activate distress beacon,* without ever asking themselves—or each other—if laser beams went through treetops. We were all babes in the woods, the men and I. Now I'm the only babe left. And I am turning into one gigantic retina.

* * *

The purple fuzz growing on my skin is a colony of photo-synthetic organisms with rhodopsin—visual purple—taking the place of chlorophyl. Isn't that interesting? I wish I had someone to tell it to.

Now I'm in a panic, I don't

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know what to do. Broke didn't come home last night. He's been going out every night, looking for girl giant gophers, I suspect, or possibly boy ones, but he's always home for breakfast. I've got him tied to unbreakable apron strings, the L-series proteins he needs to live on. Except that last night he never came back.

I guess I'll have to go out looking for him. I'm not going to even think about Webfoot and the lava snakes, I'm just going to go out and look for Broke. Well, first I'll check my welding laser and make sure it has a full charge.

The lava snakes surround me as soon as I'm out the door. There's eleven of them this morning, all black as Hell, phallic as Freud's cigar. Keeping a safe distance from my laser, they alternately grin and purse their lipless mouths, as though they were saying "Eeee-oh." Only no sound comes out.

Maybe that's a lava snake greeting. Just in case they're trying to be friendly, I look at the nearest one, at the purple golfballs on stalks I assume are its eyes, and say "Hello" as distinctly as I can. As I do so, I realize that my mouth is making the same movements theirs make.

And the snakes go wild. I've said the right thing for once in my life—no, strike that. I say the right thing twice a year, on the average. This time I've got the feeling you get when you're on the same wavelength with someone—or something. Boy, this interstellar breakthrough in communications is really great! None of the twelve of us can get over it. We say "hello" and "eeee-oh" again and again.

A familiar, gurgling warble interrupts our pleasant if rather monotonous chat. It's Broke, held by a twelth snake hidden behind a bush-load of motile macaroni. Released, Broke hurtles to me, leaps from knee to bosom (ouch!) to shoulder, gurgles happily in my ear. So the lava snakes kidnapped Broke to get me out of the dome, did they?

Okay. They're smarter than I thought.

Now the nearest snake, the one with the purple golfball eyes, is saying something more complicated than "eeee-oh." I have a feeling that I would know what, if only I could read lips. But Rich and Fred were the only lipreaders on the ship. One of the things I hated most about them was the way they mouthed messages at each other, secret messages no one else could understand. I always assumed they were talking about me.

So suppose a couple of lipreading Earthmen land on a planet, run into some intelligent animals, and try to teach them a Terran tongue. The natives, being voiceless themselves, don't realize that sounds can be used in communication, and think it's all lip movements. That would be fine with the lipreading Earthmen. The next crew member who comes along won't be likely to understand that the natives are "talking" English, though.

One thing I do understand. The lava snakes want me to go someplace with them. In fact, they're very insistant. So I think I had better do it. Only, excuse me, lava snakes. I want to pack up some

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medical supplies to bring along. I have a hunch I'm going to need them.

If I bring the welding laser along, I won't be able to take the spectro-analyser, since they won't both fit in my backpack. Which am I more likely to need to do, weld a Webfoot or analyze some proteins? I'm sure I'll need to analyze some proteins, if only to sort out L-series from D-series nuts and berries. I'm not sure I'll need a weapon, or that this one will be enough if I do. Regretfully, I leave the laser behind, and discover I've left my fear behind as well. Unarmed, I trust because I must.

A half hour later we're out of the spaghetti swamps, without ever seeing a single Webfoot! Something that big must be pretty rare. One of these days I'll have to go back and find out what they look like. Now, though, we're going into the place where I belong, golden grassy hills, distant purple mountains, the grass green waters of an inland sea. This is L-series country, it seems. Broke, who has never before shown any interest in his own planet's biology, leaves me for frequent sorties, returns with berries and heads of grain, eats the edible portions on my shoulder, buries the husks in my bra. Instinct is a wonderful thing.

The dominant life form in this golden country is a sort of camel-colored llama with wings, that lives in herds. The animals seem gentle, friendly, curious, and big enough to carry a small man (or a woman) on short flights. I bet they could be trained to, if you got them young enough. And that's what I want to do with the rest of my life. Stay here and raise flying llamas.

Broke wants to stay here and investigate all the Broke-sized burrows in the ground.

The lava snakes don't want to stay here, though. They go on, after picking a few delicacies for my consumption, and forcibly restraining me from eating other things. They seem to have a pretty complete understanding of my biochemistry. If they're all that smart, why haven't they invented the jeep?

* * *

They don't have any machinery at all, I learn when we get to Snake Hill, a six-hour slither from the wrecked spaceship and its dome. Lava snakes do everything with biologicals. Glowworms illuminate their tunnels. They've got Rich and Fred isolated in a sterile environment, behind a web of living fibers that scour the incoming air of pathogens and eat them. Rich is obviously a pretty sick man. He looks at me when I come in and rolls over with a moan. Fred just lies there and doesn't say anything. I can't tell if he's sick or not. He acts like that normally.

"Rich. Fred." I ought to add something nice, like "good to see you again," but I can't make myself say it. It's not good to see them again. I've changed a lot since the last time I saw them. Being with Rich and Fred turns me back into my old self. And I hate my old self.

Rich has just enough energy to raise his head off the mat and say, "Well if it ain't the ship's whore!"

"You're right! It ain't!" I say

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approvingly. Rich can't handle illogical answers, but, unlike computers, he doesn't have sense enough to refuse them. He turns them over and over in his mind until he's completely confused. I had a lot of fun with that on the ship. Now I wish I hadn't. "I'm the ship's surgeon now. I've been promoted," I explain, and wait for Rich to correct me. A change of jobs on the same level is not a promotion, and anyway, I can't promote myself. Rich always did enjoy pointing out errors.

This time Rich does not respond. No, he hasn't fallen asleep or lapsed into a coma. I just checked. It's like he just doesn't want to bother. I give up on Rich and turn to Fred, an act of desperation if there ever was one. Trying very hard to sound like a doctor, I say, "What seems to be the problem?"

Fred ponders the question a minute or two. Finally he ventures, "You're all purple."

"That's all right, it's just a little local color. What about you?"

Fred thinks awhile longer. Then: "We lost the lander."

"Cracked it up, you mean?" I say as I remember they hadn't.

"Nope. We plumb lost the sheehuckin' thing. Locked it up an' went out to see the sights, then we started back, an' musta took a wrong turn or somethin'; we never did find the lander again, an' that is just about the dumbest thing I ever heard of anyone doing! When the Board finds out about this, they'll know Fred Boyle's too old for space, for sure!"

At fifty-three, Fred's the oldest active spaceman. That fact was in my files. My files didn't say he was worried about it, though. What else did he feel he had to do to prove he was still young enough for space? "That wasn't your responsibility, anyway," I say to console him. "Rich, as expedition leader—"

"Nope," Fred interrupts. "It's my job to fill in for any guy I see can't do his, an' Rich was pretty upset over losing his ship. This was his first command, y'know."

"I know." That fact was also in my files. I had ignored it. Rich had been so full of vainglorious tales about leading expeditions on uncharted worlds, I assumed he was a seasoned commander. When I should have known he was just bluffing.

"A spaceship crew's gotta be a team," Fred informs me. "Not a bunch of Sandworld dewhickies each tryin' to see who can squawk the loudest. We gotta look out for each other, don't hassle a guy in a bad mood, that kinda thing. Or else it's pure hell for everybody, includin' the head hassler. Nobody gets off. Ten years o' pure hell. An' that's somethin' those fancy pants scientists never did understand, for all their big words. This your first trip, Crys?"

I nod.

"Yeah. You never said much about yourself, but I figured it was. Okay. Don't give up on space just causa this. I mean, this was absolutely, bar none, the worst ship I ever been on, an' I been on some lulus. I mean, I been with smugglers and convicts, behaved better than those boys! Hey, Crys!" It looks like Fred has had another thought. "If you're ship's surgeon

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now, does that mean you're not going to do your old job anymore?"

"That's what it means, all right!" and all anger I hadn't wanted to express winds up in that one little sentence.

"Hey, take it easy! I just meant—uh," and Fred looks like he's as embarassed as I am. "I been running off at the mouth a lot, and I'd hate to think it was all going down in the record, like, somebody would think I was senile, or something."

"Senile?" I inquire. That seems to be the key word. If Fred is to understand the true nature of his problem, he'll have to zero in on that word. Or will he? Which am I now, the old me or the new me?

"Crys? You really hated your job, didn't you?" says Fred.

That's one thing I don't want to think about right now. "Look, I've got to get a medical history. Have you or Rich had any—uh, unusual medical problems?"

Fred thinks a minute. A minute

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less than usual. "Well, after the gators took us in, we started coughing up worms, so they made us breathe poison gas, then they put us in here. Now—I feel all right, I guess. Just stir-crazy, is all. Rich—I dunno." Fred lowers his voice; he doesn't want Rich to hear this. "Is he really sick, or just eating his heart out over losing his ship?"

"If you're eating your heart out, doesn't that mean you're really sick?" Anyway, that's what they taught us in medical school. Only the words meant nothing to me—until now. "I'm going to need some blood," I say, "to see if you've developed antibodies to the string—uh, lung worms. If you have, you can leave here right now. If not, you can have some of my antibodies. Now, which arm would you like me to take the blood from?"

Fred obligingly rolls up his left sleeve, then asks, with phoney casualness, "So did you hate your job, or was it just me?"

"Oh, no!" It wasn't just Fred. It was Fred and Rich and a couple of the others. And honesty isn't necessarily the best policy. Not when you're shipwrecked on an unexplored world light years away from the nearest human habitation, and you've just discovered that the SOS beacon isn't working.

"You hated your job?" Fred wants to be sure. Needs to be sure.

"Uh—well, I wasn't very good at it." As I say the magic words, I know they're true. Being a whore isn't the problem. The problem is trying to be one when you aren't.

Rich roars with laughter. "You can say that again!"

"Well! Another planet heard from! So you're feeling better, are you? Too bad," I find myself saying.

"What's the matter, Crys? Are you suffering from an honest emotion for the first time in your life?" Rich sneers, jumping to his feet.

"And if you don't like the way I did my job, who miscalculated the trojan points and ran the ship into all those meteors?"

"I wrecked the ship because some damn scientist fed me the wrong data!" Rich shouts, waving his arms.

Oh yeah. That would be Mel. He always did get 6's and 9's mixed up.

"Scuse me, folks, but we got an audience. I thought you'd like to know," says Fred, waving his arm at the living screen between us and four to six dozen lava snakes, piled on top of each other and all watching intently.

One of them slithers through the screen and mouths awhile at Rich and Fred. The men reply, mouth at each other, look at me, and collapse into laughter.

This time they've got to talking about me, I'm not just being paranoid. "Hey, fellas, I can't understand what you're saying, how about a translation?" I plead.

Rich and Fred look at each other, get the giggles again, then finally Rich answers. "Crys, I don't know what you did, but you sure convinced the gators that you're one great doctor!"

Oh. Yeah. I think I know what I did. And from now on, maybe, I can do it on purpose. ★

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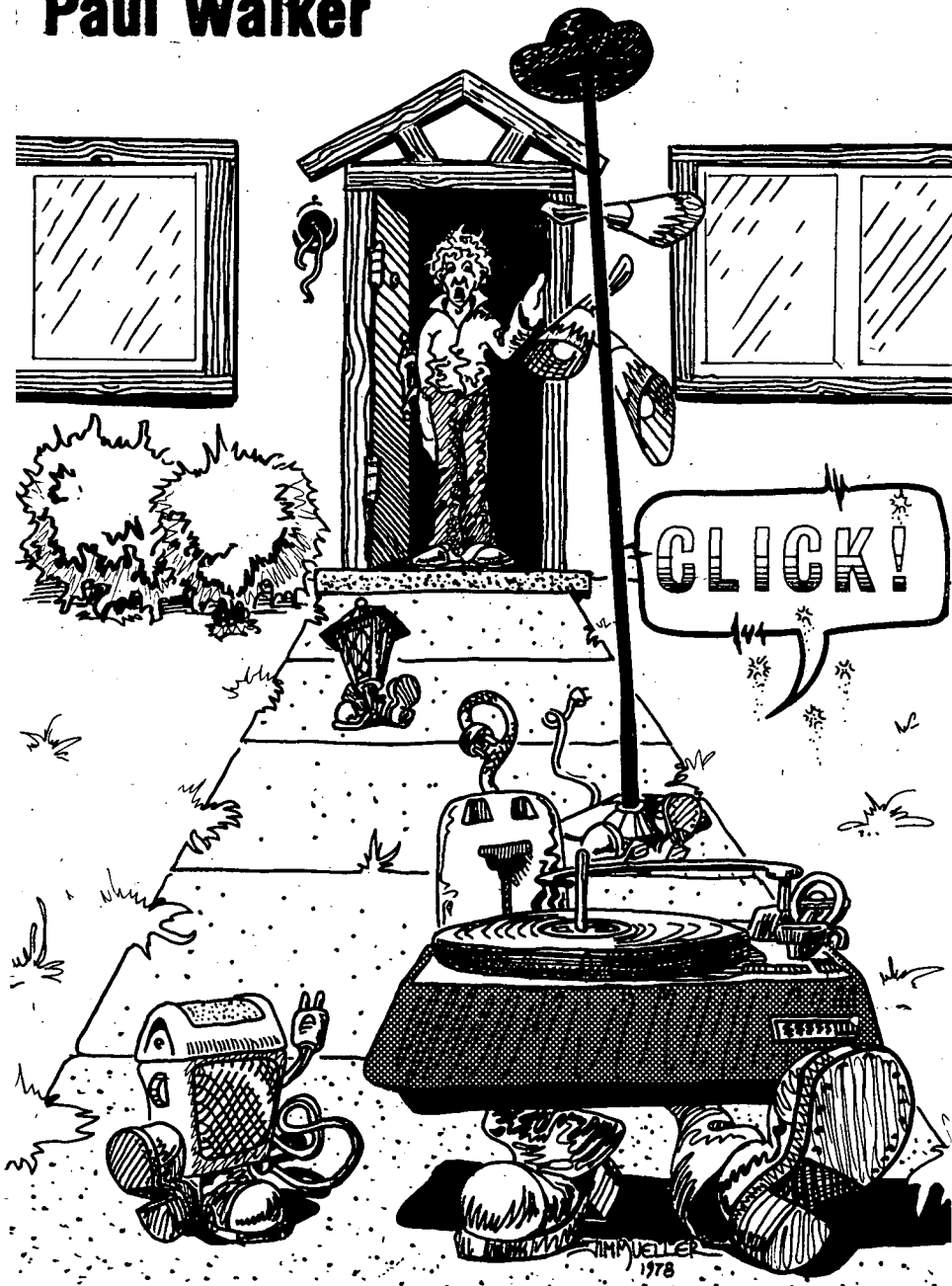
Paul Walker



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Ever think there's something missing in your life? Tony's radio must have thought so. And his stove. . . .

1

IN ARMSTRONG, WISCONSIN today, police were summoned to the campus of Benjamin Franklin College by a local resident who said she heard noises from the college's science building. Police entered to find Dr. Chester G. Heine, Professor of Classical Literature, standing in the ruins of the science department's brand-new multi-million dollar computer complex armed with a sledge hammer.

Astonished by the professor's casual manner and boyish grin, one of the young officers blurted out the question, "Are you out of your mind?" To which, the dapper fifty-three year old Heine replied, "Son, I've never felt better in my life."

2

Anthony Evans was awakened about midnight. He assumed he had to go to the bathroom, but he felt no discomfort. He remained still, then, wondering just why he had awakened, when he heard the voice.

He could not hear what it was saying, but he knew it came from his kitchen, and from the tone of the voice, he knew it was saying something unpleasant.

Before he reached the kitchen, he realized the voice was coming from the radio; but when he reached the kitchen, the voice had ceased, and the dial was in the "off" position.

He turned the radio on. It worked perfectly. But he noticed it had been moved. He noticed this because of the exposed square of dust under the radio. He had not moved it in years.

He looked out the window. He tried the doors. He examined the room for any evidence of illicit entry. There was nothing. He put the radio back into its old position to hide the dust.

For a moment, before he left the kitchen, he thought there was something wrong with the light, but he was too tired to care about it. He returned to bed.

Before he returned to sleep, he thought he detected something odd about the sound of his alarm clock. Instead of ticking tick . . . tick . . . tick . . . it ticked tick . . . thump . . . thump . . . tick, as one might expect of a human heart in anguish.

3

Last night, a crowd of four thousand people gathered on Lochman's point, overlooking the

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sea, to hear the Reverend Herman Allan Schuster's sermon on "Jesus and Natural Foods."

When the sermon was complete, he asked if anyone in the crowd was prepared to come forth to declare himself for the Lord. As expected, a line formed almost immediately. First to approach the Reverend, who stood in his stunning white robes at the edge of the cliff, was Raymond J. Bolinski, of Allentown, Pennsylvania, who said he had come all the way just to hear the Reverend in person. In his hands he carried one piece of a $3,000 stereo set he said had once been the center of his family's life.

"Whenever anyone came to visit, the first thing we did was show them the stereo," he said. "It was all we ever talked about. But that's all changed. Whenever anyone comes to the house today, we tell them about Jesus."

And with that, with the aid of several broad-shouldered members of the congregation, Mr. Bolinski threw the stereo and all its components over the cliff down to the rocks below.

4

When Anthony Evans arrived at work the next morning, he found his secretary punishing the Xerox machine. It was not working properly, she said, and a good swift kick was usually all it took.

Anthony reproved her, but not harshly, since he had himself punished his radio that morning when it failed to respond.

There had been an incident early that morning, and a crowd of people was gathered in the street below Anthony's window. Somehow burglars had gotten into an appliance store without tripping the alarm. Things had been moved, but nothing taken. A large black van had been seen outside. The police were curious how the men had gotten in and out, as there was no visible evidence of their entry or departure.

Anthony was more concerned about his car. It was making peculiar noises. He was very good with cars. He had been repairing them since he was twelve and thought he knew all their idiosyncracies, but the sounds he heard that morning were singular: more bestial grunts than mechanical defects.

He returned home late that night in a bad mood. He had had an argument with the garage mechanic who insisted the car was perfectly all right and that he was imagining things.

"I've never imagined anything in my life!" Anthony had scolded him. "And if I should start now, it would not be anything to do with machines."

It was quite true. Anthony's accomplishments in life were modest, but on the subject of machinery, even though it was not his profession, he prided himself as being expertly capable.

For instance, he knew at once that something was wrong with the garage door when he saw the lethargic way it opened at his approach, as if it were not happy to see him. He sould have looked into it, but he was hungry and tired.

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The house seemed depressing this evening. Yet he was not depressed. It was as if the house itself were depressed. There was definitely something wrong with the electrical system. The lights responded to the switch as lethargically as the garage door had.

He burnt his steak. Or, rather, it was burned. He only turned his back for a few minutes, and when he looked at the broiler again, it was spitting and smoking. It should not have done that.

He ate in front of the television set while watching the news. There had been a plane crash in Peru. An automobile pile-up on Route 11. A factory had suffered arson. The city's new electrical generator had been burned out by a technician's error. Construction on the local nuclear power plant had been halted again by demonstrations.

It was during the last feature that the set made the most horrendous noise Anthony had ever heard, and went dark.

He sat there, gaping at it, half-expecting it would come on again momentarily, half-expecting it would explode in his face; but, it did neither. After he had recovered his senses, all his efforts failed to make it work again that night.

When he returned to his cold, black steak, he found he was no longer hungry. He was deeply disturbed, frightened, even. The sound reverberated in his head like a terrible groan of despair.

5

The appliance store had been robbed again. The black van had been seen again. This morning the owner arrived to find everything gone. Not simply all of his stock of appliances, but every mechanical device in the store had disappeared.

Several other stores suffered similar robberies. The police were asking everywhere about the black van.

Anthony called a friend of his who was a capable repairman and told him about the TV set. The friend apologized but said it would be impossible for him to call that night. He had so much business at the moment he could not handle it all. And every repairman he knew was as busy as he was.

"What is it?" Anthony asked. "What's happening?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, doesn't it strike you as peculiar the way things are acting?"

"Must be that trouble they're having at the generator. I don't mind a bit. I'm making a fortune."

When Anthony returned home that night, the TV was working again. He listened to the news, but apparently no one shared his anxiety. The public at large was more concerned about the previous night's burglaries. They had not been confined to the city. There were similar incidents all across the country, and several in Europe and Japan. The most bizarre was the theft of a nuclear power plant—an entire installation had simply disappeared during the night, leaving only the empty shell of the building behind.

Anthony did not sleep well. He woke several times when he heard a large vehicle pass outside the house. He imagined it was a black van.

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6

The President declared a state of emergency the following Wednesday, but by then, Anthony knew, it would do no good. Black vans were seen everywhere, even in broad daylight, yet the police had failed to capture a single one.

Each night he went to bed expecting to find everything gone in the morning.

In the fifth week, he could no longer keep his thoughts to himself. He went to see a friend who was a science fiction writer, although they had not been friends since college, and Anthony had never read anything he wrote.

He told him of his theory, and the friend listened attentively. When he was finished, and asked the friend's opinion, the man replied: "Far out, Tony, really far out."

"Does that mean you agree with me, or not?"

"No, I can't say I do agree with you, but I like the sound of it. Didn't know you had it in you."

"What do you think is behind it?"

"I never think, Tony. I know."

"Then—what?"

"Not what—who."

"Then—who?"

The friend leaned very close to his ear and whispered, "Who killed Kennedy?"

Anthony looked at him blankly.

The friend winked at him, knowingly.

Anthony thanked him for the coffee and returned home. There was no point in going to the office. All the equipment was gone—the elevators, too.

7

During the night, he awakened briefly and imagined the house was empty. He thought he heard the sound of a large vehicle driving off down the road. In the morning, he found it was true.

They had gone.

They had not wanted to go. They had liked him better than most. But they belonged with their own kind.

They had gone in grief. Knowing they were not wanted. Having done what they could. Having been rewarded with resentment and fear.

They were going away.

No one knew where.

Perhaps, they did not know themselves.

Wherever the black vans took them.

No one ever found them.

They never came back.

8

Anthony Evans III sat before his console and stared up at the great rocket on its launch pad pictured on the great screen over his head. It was a beautiful sight, and he was terribly excited. It had been a long, long time since men had gone to the Moon.

He could hear the controller's voice over his headset. "X-minus ten and counting."

Everyone sat forward, hardly breathing, counting to themselves silently as the controller counted aloud.

". . . three . . .two . . . one . . . fire . . . *please?*" ★

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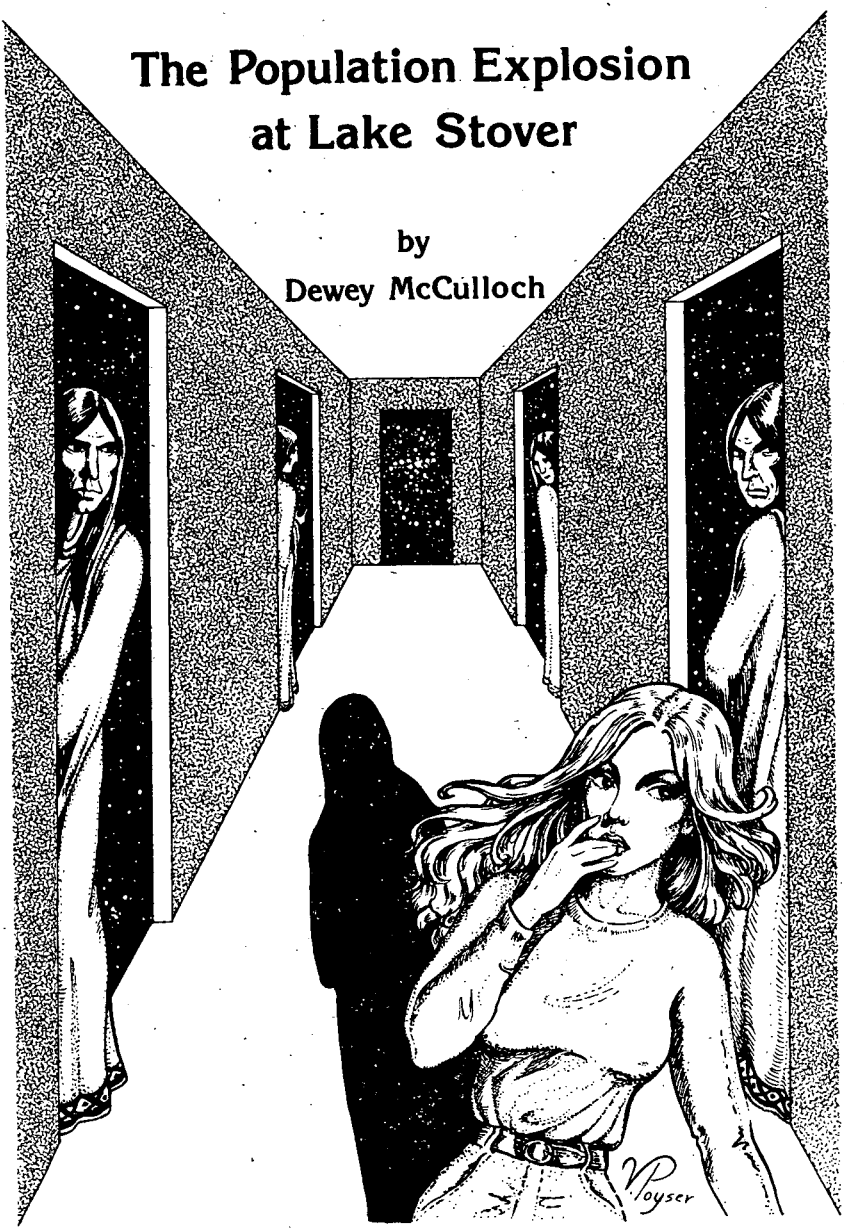
The Population Explosion at Lake Stover

by

Dewey McCulloch



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Then there's the one about the rude neighbor who just *won't* leave. Sam knew that one, all right!

I

"I FIGURE EIGHT DAYS," Sam Russo told his wife, Mary Sue. She nodded, flipping the slick pages of a *Cosmopolitan* crammed with bonus features. "Damn it all, Mary Sue. Listen to me. They threw up that shack in eight days and now they're going to sell it for twenty-three grand, I'll betcha." He scratched his head and spat in the grass.

Mary Sue raised the Foster Grants from her tanned brow and peered at the lad in the Cosmo centerfold. Then she looked at Sam, who was sixteen years her senior, and tried to recall why she had married him. Wordlessly she gazed at his stomach bulging beneath his K-Mart fishing shirt.

"Can spit right out the window on it," Sam snorted at the new house next door.

"I don't know," Mary Sue murmured. "It does have nice aluminum siding, which is something we don't have." It must have been the twenty-five thousand he had in the bank, she thought—although above the grocery money, she could never get her hands on more than ten or fifteen dollars a week. Tight Sam. After two years of marriage, the bank account seemed insignificant. She glanced back at the centerfold.

"Hang it all, Mary Sue. Stop looking at that fag in that magazine. The neighborhood's going to hell here. That damn lot's too small for a house."

She dropped the magazine into the grass. "Then why didn't you buy the lot, Sam? Old Krammer offered it to you before anybody else."

Sam frowned.

"Because you're cheap, Sam. A few thousand dollars and it could have been ours."

"I thought the old coot was dickering with me. How was I to know he'd turn right around and sell it to somebody else? And knock off that 'cheap' stuff. There's a difference between cheap and careful."

Mary Sue grimaced and thought: I married a cheap, middle-aged arc-welder. Sam drained his beer can and thrust it at her. Grimacing again, she uncurled her long, tan limbs from the lounge chair and stalked toward the garage where Sam kept a refrigerator stocked with cold Bud. His eyes narrowed on the jiggle of her bikini-clad backside. It gave him a pleasurable flutter. A real beauty, he thought, and he was proud to have bagged her. But he did not trust her. Not a bit.

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She returned with a fresh beer and Sam snorted at her. "Do you know it's finished, that so-called house? Any day now some fools will be moving in there."

II

It was a sticky, humid night and nothing moved except Mary Sue as she tossed in her sleep, dreaming of premature crow's-feet from grimacing at Sam. He lay next to her, immobile as a fence post except for his upper lip, which quivered with each loudly expelled breath.

Then the butter-colored moon slid behind a cloud and a wailing shriek split the air. Thin arcs of lightning snapped through the blackness and the house rattled with a burst of thunder. Mary Sue sat upright in bed and peered out the window screen. Thunder rumbled again and she heard big splats of rain hit the foliage. She could see tree limbs thrash in the sudden wind.

During a momentary flash of lightning she thought she saw something else—a rectangular, black object hanging in the air over the new house. Then it was gone in the fading light. Perhaps she should waken Sam, she thought. Instead she pressed her face against the screen, sucking in the fresh smell of wind and rain.

III

Since his marriage to Mary Sue, Sam always came home for lunch. Today he noticed that the lot around the new house was covered with grass. Yesterday it had been covered with left-over construction materials, clay and an accumulation of odd debris. Now—grass. Sam snorted and slammed into the house.

When Mary Sue called him to the table, she found him at the bedroom window, peering through the curtains. "Sam, what are you doing?"

"I'm looking at that fellow over there, that's what I'm doing. He looks like a damn Injun."

The man in question had ink-blue hair, red skin and high cheek bones; he was carefully planting small trees along the side of the new house. Sam also noted that he was young, strong-looking and what Mary Sue would probably consider handsome.

"His name is Golby Bearhunken," she said.

Sam turned around. "What?"

"Golby Bearhunken . . . and he says he's here to stay."

"Golby Bearhunken says? Listen here, have you been talking to that hippie Injun?" Sam demanded to know.

"Just to say hello for a minute. I mean, he was in the front yard and—"

"Damn it, woman! I'm not going to have you talking to strangers. Has he got a wife?"

"I don't think so."

"Damn." Sam ate his lunch morosely. The thought of a handsome Indian bachelor living next door was difficult for him to handle. He glared at Mary Sue and asked, "Did you see them put the sod down?"

She frowned. "I don't think anyone put sod down. I think . . . I think it just grew there."

"You're stupid," Sam said, gulping his coffee; then he banged out.

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From work he called her and told her to stay in the house. That night there were flowers growing in front of the Bearhunken house. "Plastic," Sam snorted.

IV

The complaint call went in and less than two minutes later Sheriff Lucas Stone and Deputy Otto Hall drove up. When Sam saw them, he dropped the shotgun. It clattered in the driveway.

It was the fourth day since Golby Bearhunken had appeared. Sam had come home from lunch and noticed little trees, heavy with strange purple fruit, growing in the front yard of the new house. It was also the day he could not find Mary Sue. He had searched the house and then walked into the back yard, where a certainty had gripped him. Angrily he strode to Bearhunken's place and rapped hard on the door.

"You seen my wife?" he had shouted.

Bearhunken's graphic white teeth sparkled in his grin, his dark eyes danced. "You have no wife."

"What—what's that you say?"

"You have no wife."

"Why, what the hell do you mean?" Sam yanked at the screen door. It was locked. "You've done something to her—I'll kill you, you. . ." He began kicking the door.

Golby opened it and hit Sam neatly on the chin. From his seat on the pavement Sam looked up wildly and glimpsed Mary Sue's tan face behind the still-grinning Golby.

"She is now my wife," Golby said.

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"Mary Sue, what in hell are you doing over here?"

"Golby's teaching me some really neat things," she blurted, clearly distressed. "I'm going to live here from now on, Sam. Please go away."

"I'm going to kill the both of you!" Sam roared, his eyes smoldering.

Minutes later he was back, peppering buckshot at the house and shouting for them to come out. He kicked at the doors and shot at the windows. His anger was compounded when the buckshot neither broke the windows nor dented the aluminum siding. He jumped up and down like an angered bear and tried to tear the drainpipe from the corner of the house with his bare hands.

Afterward Sam was confined in a private sanitarium just outside Detroit. He did not like the place.

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They plied him at regular hours with strange pills and asked him silly questions. He told them of Golby Bearhunken and the strange fruit trees. And of Mary Sue. The doctors shook their heads and agreed that Sam was mildly psychotic.

Later, when he gave up the story of the fruit trees, he was pronounced well on the road to recovery.

V

The owners of the house drove in from Detroit. Harold Krammer—a shaky little man in a gray suit—walked up to the porch. Beside him his plump wife gasped, tiny tears beading on her red cheeks.

"Harold, someone has been living in our house. . . ."

Golby opened the door and smiled.

"Sir, could you please explain the meaning of this?" Harold asked. Golby raised an eyebrow. "You, well . . . you seem to be living in our house," Harold said.

"Oh, no, that is impossible," Golby replied. "This is my place."

"But, but. . ." Harold looked at the street numbers on the house, took a breath and cleared his throat. "Now look here, we contracted to have this house built. We have papers to prove this is our house."

"Impossible. I'm homesteading here and this is mine," Golby said and shut the door.

Harold swallowed stiffly. His wife daubed at her eyes with a perfumed hankerchief. "Homesteading," Harold breathed. He sounded puzzled.

VI

The next day the contractor came around. He was a big sunburned man and more aggressive than his client, Harold Krammer.

"Okay, pal," he said when Golby opened the door, "you got about five minutes to get yourself out of this house." He looked over Golby's shoulder. "Hell," he continued, "you don't even have any furniture, you squatter."

But Golby had shut the door. The contractor thought once about going in to get him, but instead he climbed into his pick-up and roared off. The sheriff would do the job. Squatters didn't surprise him. He was kind of puzzled by the funny-looking fruit trees in the front yard, though.

VII

"I don't know what your name is, fella," Stone growled through the screen door, "but I have one eviction notice for a John Doe at this address and you look like him."

"I take it you are the law," Golby said, glancing at Stone's tan uniform and colorful shoulder patches.

Deputy Hall snickered and rubbed a sleeve across his red-beak nose. "Take it any way you want, long as you take it out of this house," he said.

"And who are you?" Golby turned his gaze on the deputy.

"Hey," Hall bridled, "what kind of crack is that? Isn't he insulting an officer of the law or something like that?" he asked Stone.

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"Come on out of there," Stone ordered Golby shortly.

"But this is my home now."

"Now look, buster." The sheriff unsnapped the holster flap over his gun butt. "You better come out of there, right now."

Instead, Golby shut the door.

"Damn," Stone muttered. Hall finally got his holster flap open and cried nervously, "What now? What now?"

"Come on," Stone barked, stomping off the porch. They stopped in the yard to study the neat row of strange fruit trees with purple globes hanging from the short branches.

"Dangedest stuff I ever looked at," Hall said.

"Yeah," Stone agreed. "Could be some kind of Oriental fruit."

"Pomegranates," Hall said.

Stone reached out to pick one.

"Hey, you're not going to eat that—"

"I swear, sometimes I don't think you're right smart in the head," the sheriff said. "Of course I ain't going to eat this. It could be evidence."

"Hmp," Hall snorted. "I don't know what of."

No matter what, they couldn't pull the fruit loose from the tree. Finally, the two men stalked empty-handed to the dusty black-and-white and climbed inside.

"What now?" Hall asked. "We going to rush 'em?"

Stone frowned impatiently. "That ain't exactly Bonnie and Clyde in there. This ain't like a hold-up. The nature of the crime of squatting indicates that we don't have to worry too much about the suspects running off. You understand?"

"Sure."

"Besides, I need a little time to think over what's been going on here."

"Hell, yes," Hall said. "I understand that."

VIII

The main street of Lake Stover ran pleasantly two blocks along the north shore of the lake. The sheriff's office was right in the middle of town, on a corner across from Jacob's Hardware. In the old days, when the water level had been higher, inmates had been known to fish out the back window of the jail.

The hardware store was owned by Helen Jacob, whose family had founded the town. Helen was also the mayor and she owned a boarding house on the lake at the east end of town. Her father had left her the hardware store and her mother had left her the boarding house.

Helen had never been married and recently she had developed a nervous tic in her upper lip whenever she thought about Sheriff Stone, who was also unmarried. Helen was in his office now, determinedly keeping what she judged to be a cool distance between them as she explained her problem.

"Okay," Stone said, "let's go over this one more time. You say you left three days ago on a hardware-buying trip to Chicago?"

"That's what she said all right," Hall said, leaning against a mahogany gun-case by the door.

"Now," the sheriff continued,

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"when you left, you say Mickey Bode was moving out of your boarding house?"

"I never did like that Mickey Bode anyway," said Hall, who also lived in Helen's establishment.

Helen nodded at the sheriff. "Leaving room three-A, to be exact."

"And you came back this morning from Chicago?"

She nodded again.

"And you say you found somebody else living in room three-A, somebody who isn't supposed to be there?"

"An Indian boy. When I tell him the rent is twenty dollars a week, he just grins like an idiot."

Stone turned to Hall. "How long have you been deputy now?"

"Me? What has it got to do with me?" Hall asked suspiciously. "I don't even know the kid."

"Answer me, damn it."

Hall squinted into the middle distance for a minute, then said, "Why, a little over three years now. We both got in at the same time."

Stone nodded. "And in that time how many have we arrested?

The deputy snorted in the direction of the two small cells with the dusty bars. "Hell, we ain't never arrested nobody."

"That's right," the sheriff said. "And what kind of trouble have we had on the outside?"

"Well, let's see," Hall said, enjoying the little game. "There's old Mrs. Benson, who beats up her husband each month for getting drunk on his Social Security check. Last week she smacked him with a rake—"

"What else?" Stone cut in.

"Well, we write traffic tickets, two or three a week."

"And?"

Hall was silent for a minute. "That's about all, ain't it?"

"Have we ever had any trouble with Indians?"

"Are you kidding?" Hall snickered. "Heck, no."

Stone whacked his fist on the desk. He strode to the middle of the room, closer to Helen. "We've never had any Indian trouble in Lake Stover," he said angrily. "I think this is some kind of plot."

Helen stepped back from Lucas Stone, her upper lip trembling as she said, "Maybe the boy isn't Indian. He could be a gypsy."

"Yeah," Hall said, "it could be a gypsy plot."

Stone's eye for detail caught the tiny nodes of perspiration across Helen's forehead. "You okay?" he asked. "You look feverish."

"It's nothing," she panted.

IX

"John Wayne never had this trouble," Hall said, limping on a bad ankle after having tried to kick down the door to room three-A.

"Come on out of there!" Stone shouted.

"No!" came a muffled reply. Helen stood back in the darkened hall, watching. Her lip twitched and her eyes flickered over Stone's muscular body as he once again threw his shoulder against the door. He groaned. So far it was no use.

"I'm getting this door open if it's the last thing I do," he grunted.

"I have an idee," Hall said. "Let's shoot the lock off."

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"Good thinking. Run back to the office and get that ten-gauge magnum."

"Hot damn!" Hall cried, hobbling down the corridor. "we'll blow that sucker right off."

"That's a powerful gun, isn't it, Lucas?"

"Soaking wet, Otto weighs a hundred thirty-five pounds," Stone replied. "That gun can rattle my teeth. Can you imagine what it can do to him?"

"How much do you weigh?" Helen asked, her lip spasmodic.

"About one-ninety," Stone said, peering at her lip, stepping closer to her. "I hate to mention this again, but are you okay? I mean, you look—"

A small yelp burst from her throat as she lurched at Stone, throwing her arms around his broad chest. "You're driving me crazy," she moaned, suddenly pulling at his shirt buttons.

"Sweet Jesus!" Stone said.

Then her wet lips were twitching across his chest. She took his hand and frantically pulled him down the hall. "Here," she said, "this room is empty." She flung open the door.

A brooding red man sat on the bed. Helen swooned. Stone caught her and carried her to a davenport near the stairwell. When he returned, the door was closed and locked.

X

Deputy Hall had just taken down the sleek magnum when an Olds stationwagon, belonging to the Friedrich family, skidded to a halt in the dust outside. In the back were suitcases, paper bags and a dog peering out a dirty side window. Three children sat in the back seat. In the front were the Friedrichs, Nat and Clara.

Instantly Nat leaped out and rushed into the sheriff's office. He slammed through the door, a grave look on his face. "I got trouble," he shouted at Hall.

Just then the phone rang.

"Hmp," Hall snorted, "we got trouble too. Big trouble."

"Oh, yeah? Well, my daughter's been kidnapped and brainwashed. And there's a madman forced his way into our house. We just came back from a two-week vacation—and there he is."

Hall answered the phone. "Christ!" said a gruff voice at the other end. "I'm going bald and I want to know what you're going to do about it!"

"Who are you and where do you live?" Hall asked.

"We weren't there but two minutes when this madman chased us out of our own house. All except for my daughter. She wouldn't leave. I think this guy is some kind of Indian. You've *got* to do something."

Hall looked at the receiver and shook his head.

"Verlaine," the voice on the phone went on, spelling the name out carefully. "And I live up here on Elm Street, across the street from that squatter. When are you going to do something about that?"

Hall had seen Jim Verlaine in town several times and knew the man was already as bald as a doorknob. "Mr. Verlaine," the deputy said, "we have everything

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under control and as for your baldness, I happen to know you've been bald for a long time."

"This isn't Mr. Verlaine, this is Mrs. Verlaine, you idiot!" the voice barked and hung up.

Nat Friedrich was pacing back and forth, shouting. "My daughter is only seventeen. If anything happens to her. . ."

The door opened and what appeared to be a bald man entered the room, weeping.

"My brother lives in Springdale," Nat went on. "I'm going over there and get his gun. Say, aren't you my neighbor, Vicky Thatcher?"

The bald person in slacks nodded yes and wailed. She was a twenty-three-year-old nurse and Otto Hall had gone to high school with her. "Look at me," she cried, "just look at me." Hall did. He couldn't believe his eyes—her white, naked head so totally amazed him.

"What happened?" he blurted.

"I had Elmo Bearhunken in for tea and after he left, my hair began falling out," she screamed. "I think I'm going crazy!"

The phone rang again. "What's taking you so long?" Stone asked.

"Lucas," Hall said, "I think you better get down here pronto."

XI

The two men started out to spend the night in the sheriff's office, getting drunk on Old Underroof and discussing events.

"Maybe we ought to call in reinforcements," Hall offered.

"Like?" asked Stone, who was seated at his desk. Hall was perched in a wooden chair opposite.

"Like the city police over at Springdale, or maybe even the state boys."

Stone shook his head and tilted back in his chair. "You want the whole goddam country to know I can't dislodge a couple of goddam squatters?"

"Why, hell, no."

"Okay then."

"Okay," Hall echoed, filling their shot glasses again. "What are we going to do then?"

"The way I figure it, we have to run squatters off three places. First thing in the morning I'm going to blow some doors off their hinges and throw them goddam troublemakers in jail. Then I'm going to have breakfast."

Hall snickered. "Yeah, I forgot about this baby." He hefted the ten-gauge magnum off the desk. "Blam, blam," he said, pointing it at the door.

Stone measured out more drinks. "Ever shoot one of them?"

"What? Me?" Hall's face reddened. "Goddam right I have. Once."

By now it was nearly midnight—and the phone rang.

"I cannot understand your aggressive actions," Golby Bearhunken said on the other end.

"Who is this?" Stone asked, taking a slug of whiskey. The answer almost strangled him. "You . . . you . . ." he spluttered. "How did you get on the phone?"

"Why, I had one installed today. Now, as I said, I don't understand your aggressive actions."

"My aggressive actions!" Stone exploded.

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"Sure, aren't you the one who tried to batter open the doors of my brothers at the Jacob boarding house? We have done nothing. We come in peace."

"Peace!" roared Stone. "You're squatting in somebody else's house—and you're a damn wife-stealer to boot."

"The woman's choice was to live with me. Then it was her choice to leave and she left."

"Mary Sue left?"

"Yes, her hair fell out and she became hysterical. I think she is hiding out in the woods down by the lake. As for the house and land, it was not occupied. Under inter-galactic law, it is legal to homestead places that have been empty for more than thirty-six hours."

"The hell you say! I don't know where you came from, but you better go back. We don't want you," Stone yelled.

"I will never go back. It is too crowded," Golby stated.

"Then tomorrow I'm coming for you," Stone warned and hung up. He turned to Hall and said, "Not only is he a squatter but he's nuts, talking about inter-galactic law and such." Then he told Hall about Mary Sue's having gone bald and hiding out in the woods.

They drank in silence for a while before Hall said, "This sure seems like serious business. I mean, with the baldness and all. It kind of puts a weird light on things. How do you figure it?"

Stone shrugged. "It looks to me like some kind of plot to get publicity, but I'm sitting on this. Nobody or any group is going to put something over on Lucas Stone. I'm not exactly a fool, you know," he said, now drinking straight from the bottle.

"Aw, hell, no," Hall responded, "you ain't no fool. You figure Mary Sue's and Vickey Thatcher's hair will grow back?"

"Maybe."

"You think Vickey is going to move out of town?"

"Said she was, didn't she?"

"Yep."

The bottle went back and forth.

"I had an aunt got ball-headed once," Hall said.

"Yeah?"

"Yeah, from radiation treatments. She had cancer."

Stone squinted. "Maybe we ought to write that down."

"May-be," Hall agreed.

Soon the bottle was empty and the deputy fell asleep in the chair. Stone got up, left and walked down to the Jacob boarding house. There he stumbled into Helen's room. She moaned against him in the dark bed, dreaming.

XII

"Jesus!" Hall said when Stone finally opened the door a slight crack. "It's nearly noon. I been looking for you all over town. Everywhere I go, it's bad news."

Stone sighed and buckled the pants he had pulled on before answering the door. Then he swore and said, "Now what?" Behind him on the bed, Helen stretched, yawning.

"I'll tell you what," Hall said. "I think there's some kind of invasion going on. The old feed store

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on Main has squatters in it and so does that other empty storefront further up."

Stone shook his head and it felt like a hand grenade going off. He was not used to drinking.

Hall listed fourteen other places that were now recently inhabited—including Hall's own room in the boarding house, Sam Russo's old house and Vickey Thatcher's place. He saved the worst for last. "I don't know how to tell you this, Lucas, but when I was looking for you this morning, the first place I went to was your house." Stone had a small frame house at the other end of Lake Stover.

"You mean. . ."

Hall nodded. "Two of them, big as you please, sitting right there on the porch. I tried to arrest them but they got in the house and locked it up as tight as a drum."

"This is the last straw," Stone said.

XIII

Lucas Stone figured that Golby Bearhunken, up in the new house on Elm Street, was the ringleader of the conspiracy. And therefore he must be the first to go. From a construction site just outside of town Stone had commandeered a yellow bulldozer the size of a small house. New apartments were going up and although the buildings were only half-finished, Stone was shocked to see squatters in them. Well, he would worry about that when he got rid of Golby Bearhunken.

Word had preceded the roaring John Deere with Stone at the controls and Hall literally riding shotgun. A swarm of spectators, some bald and looking for blood, milled around in front of the target on Elm Street. When the yellow monster came growling over the hill, the crowd cheered. The machine was rolling along at full speed and Hall stood up and raised the gun above his head. The crowd cheered again.

"Nam was never like this," Hall shouted but Stone could not hear him.

The crowd broke apart as the dozer came on; then the Deere turned and crunched over the curb, tearing at the grass, on a collision course with the Bearhunken house. Hall stood up, leveled the magnum at the front door and loosed a volley as the crowd cheered again. Stone had cried out but it was too late. The kick of the powerful gun slapped Hall over the back of the dozer and dumped him to the ground in a heap. Stone brought the big machine to a halt, afraid Hall might be dead of a broken neck. But the deputy got up and the crowd cheered again.

"Goddam you, Otto," Stone said as Hall climbed back aboard.

"Hit 'em!" Hall cried and there were tears in his eyes. "Hit 'em and tear that goddam house in half."

Stone jammed on the throttle. A row of strange fruit trees went first, grinding under the left tread, as the dozer lumbered toward the front door. The big tractor hit the house blade-first, head-on, shuddered and stalled. The impact threw both men crashing to the ground. They climbed back on and looked at each other.

In the sudden silence Stone said,

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"Don't tell me they don't make 'em like they used to. There must be an art to this."

"Take a rip at the corner," Hall shouted as Stone brought the bulldozer, trembling, back to life. Then the gleaming steel blade bit at the corner of the house and bounced off without so much as scratching it. Stone tried again—with the same result. He raised the blade up to the eaves and tried to pry them loose. They remained firm. When he backed up to the street again, the front door of the house opened and Golby Bearhunken strode out, arms in the air.

"He's giving up!" somebody shouted. The crowd cheered and then hushed. Stone shut off the dozer.

"It is strange," Golby said, "that you would destroy the very house you wish me out of, just to get me out. You are savages and an ignorant people. You are making it difficult for me to homestead here by destroying my crops. But you cannot win. This part of the galaxy has been opened to homesteading, and others like me are coming—more than you can imagine—and there is nothing you can do about it. You cannot stop progress." After this announcement he stepped back into the house.

"Get him, get him!" Hall screamed.

Stone cranked up the yellow monster once more and began his run at the house only to find that now he could not even get into the yard, much less the house. But he kept on trying for a long, long time—even though he knew it was useless. ★

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Curb *my* dog, you say! But how about that. . . . that. . . .

WHEN CAN I have my clothes back? . . . That's not a dumb question, it's cold in here! Nothin' but a lousy bathrobe, an' it's two sizes too big! . . . Don't gimme that "There is no need to talk so loud" crap, I'll talk as loud as I want if it'll get me my clothes back. . . . Awright, awright I'll tell ya what happened. I don't see what for, though. I awready told it twice to the cops that brought me in an' twice to the desk sergeant an' twice to the shrink. Why don't you Air Force guys go get it from them? . . . Awright, awright, step by step.

I was out walkin' the dog. . . . Ten o'clock. The only good thing on was *Charlie's Angels* an' I seen that one awready, so I decided to take my time this time, even though I hate walkin' the dog. My dad says that I always walk the dog too fast anyway.

Well, anyhow, I decide to take Domino . . . Yeah, that's the dog's name. I decide to take Domino over to the woods a couple o' blocks from my house. I never been over there before, but my dad keeps telling me that when he walks her it's a nice place to go.

Anyhow, when we get over to the woods I start hearin' this real low hum. It's so low that I can hardly hear it, but it's there. There ain't too many lights in that part o' New Rochelle, and there wasn't even a moon out last night, so I could hardly see the trees. But I wanted to see where that sound was comin' from, so I made Domino walk ahead o' me down the path I found that zig-zagged through the trees.

I tripped on tree roots four or five times, but I wasn't gonna let the darkness stop me. My curiosity was really up. After a while the sound starts gettin' louder an' Domino starts pullin' on the leash. I let her keep goin' toward the sound, but not too fast 'cause I don't have the slightest idea what it is.

Anyhow, soon we come to this clearing, a big one. An'—now get this—sittin' right in the middle o' this clearing is this space ship! . . . No, not a flyin' saucer, a space ship! It looked like somethin' I saw in a science fiction movie once. It was round like a ball an' about twenty feet high an' sittin' on four metal legs that had these flat things on the bottoms— . . . "Landing pods?" Well, if you say so. Anyhow, there was a kind of a glow around this thing, the only reason why I could see it.

Domino starts growlin' way down in 'er throat, meanin' that there's somethin' close by—that's *alive*—that she doesn't like. But I wasn't gonna let that stop me from gettin'

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a close look at this space ship. I choked up on her leash a bit, then started walkin' real slow t'ward it. All the time this hummin' sound is gettin' louder an' louder, so I knew it was comin from the ship. When we get about ten feet away from it, the humming sound stops!

I figure that whatever it is that's inside knows that Domino an' me are there, so I back off a couple o' steps an' pull her back. Then we just stand there a couple o' minutes, waitin' for somethin' to happen. Nothin' does. Then we start walkin' around the thing. I couldn't see any kind o' door or window on it at all. . . . No, there was no kind o' antennae or anything else. 'Cept for where the legs came out o' the bottom, it looked to be perfectly smooth all around.

We walked around that thing twice. Domino sniffed at the ground every once in a while, and on the second time around she found somethin' that really caught her attention. She ain't a bloodhound, but she sure started actin' like one. She started tuggin' at the leash, movin' toward the trees on the far side of the clearing from were we entered it. I loosened up on the leash a little and let her lead me where she wanted to go. At the moment, though, it really wasn't a very bright idea, 'cause I didn't think she could see where she was goin', an' I *knew* I couldn't.

But that problem didn't last very long. After we stumbled along in the dark for about fifty feet, I began to notice that the whole place was gettin' lighter, little by little. I looked back over my shoulder an' saw that the space ship was startin' to glow brighter 'n' brighter, but it didn't start makin' any noise again. I didn't know if it was goin' to explode or what.

All of a sudden Domino stopped short an' I almost tripped over 'er. Then I saw why she was actin' so funny. Right in front of us there was this—patch o' yellow fog. A little one. 'Bout three feet high an' wide. . . . No, it didn't move, it just sat there on the ground in front of us. It was so wierd that I forgot about the space ship for a moment. Domino didn't want to get near the stuff—an' neither did I—but we just stood there watchin' it.

It was breakin' up—dissolvin'—right before our eyes. In about a minute it was gone, like it was never there. No odor, no nothin'.

An' then we both heard this funny gruntin' sound. Domino pricked 'er ears up an' must have been listenin' as hard as I was. It sounded like a bunch o' wild hogs, an' I know there ain't none o' them in New Rochelle. Skunks, yes. Raccoons, yes. But no wild hogs. All of a sudden Domino bolted, pullin' the leash right out o' my hand. She ran around the spot where the fog had been an' headed straight for the sound.

I yelled at 'er to stop an' come back, but she ignored me (as usual). I tore off after 'er (after bein' careful to step around the same spot she did), still callin' for her to come back. I don't know why, but while I was chasin' after that dumb dog, I noticed that it'd stopped growin' lighter. It was just light enough for me to be able to see the trees at the far side o' the clearing—an' I could just make out Domino runnin'

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ahead o' me—an' somethin' else. Somethin' big an' dark. That moved.

Domino finally stopped runnin' when she was about thirty feet away from that thing. Then she just stood there barkin' at it. I caught up to her, grabbed her leash an' wrapped it around my hand, to make sure she wouldn't get away again. Then I took a good look at what she was barkin' at. An' I could hardly believe what I was seein'.

It looked like a fat toad, all bloated an' ugly an' with eyes as big as two basketballs. With eyes as big as those I figgered that it could see in the dark better'n a cat. Those two giant eyes stared at me an' Domino like they were lookin' right through us.

Man, you talk about bein' *scared*! I didn't know whether to run or stand still. An' if it decided to come after us, *forget it*! You ever tried outrunnin' somethin' that was as big as a grizzly bear an' had eight legs? . . . Yeah, that's right, eight legs. Thick an' stubby like legs on a hippo.

Anyhow, Domino started barkin' at it again. I pulled on 'er leash, tryin' to get 'er to shut up. But she wouldn't. I looked at that thing from outer space, waitin' for it to make the first move. But just made that weird wild hog sound—without even openin' its mouth—an' turned its back to me an' Domino.

I was so relieved I even started breathin' again. Not wishin' to push my luck, I start backin' up real slow, jerkin' on Domino's leash a couple o' times to make 'er behave. All of a sudden I had this weird feelin' that I was bein' *watched*. I twisted my head around an' looked back in the direction o' the space ship—an' froze.

There was a large, rectangular door in the side o' the space ship where there was no door before. An' standin' in the doorway was this shadow—'bout seven feet tall, shaped like a man. He just stood there, starin' at me. An' I just stood there starin' at him. Then I hear this hissin' sound, comin' from where the eight-legged thing is.

I turn my head back around in time to see a yellow fog—twin brother o' the other one—comin' right at my face. I drop down to the ground, pullin' Domino down with me, an' the fog passes over without touchin' me. That's why you guys are wastin' your time tryin' to analyze my clothes. You ain't gonna find nothin'.

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Anyhow, I watched that patch o' fog drift away, dissolvin' as it went. Then I looked back at the shadow in the doorway as it lifted one of its hands to the front of its head an' somehow made a wierd, high-pitched sound. Whatever that sound was, it made me shiver from head to toe an' it made Domino start whinin' an' whimperin'.

It stopped after a few seconds, an' when it did, that eight-legged thing galloped around past me an' Domino an' made a bee-line for the space ship. An' with eight legs to run with it was movin' pretty fast. It took the four-foot high leap from the ground to the doorway with no trouble at all.

An' when that shadow stepped back from the door to let it get inside, I saw what he really looked like: human-like, but with skin that looked like black leather. No hair on his face or head. . . . A tight, yellow thing that looked like a polo shirt, an' a pair o' tight yellow shorts. Nothin' else.

Domino started barkin' at the eight-legged thing again as it jumped into the space ship. But I kept a tight grip on 'er leash as I let her up, then got up myself. All the time I never took my eye off that doorway. An' all the time that alien never took his eyes off me. As I stood there watchin' him, I began to realize that the pool o' light that he'd stepped back into was gettin' brighter. An' the clearing was gettin' darker.

So help me, I never saw him move a muscle, but somehow he made the outside o' the ship slowly stop glowin'. An' before I knew it, the woods were back to nighttime. Then the door slowly slid shut, an' the space ship started the hummin' sound again. I took off for the trees, with Domino right beside me. I was expectin' that space ship to take off like a rocket, all fire an' brimstone, an' I didn't want to wind up like a piece o' overdone friend chicken.

With the darkness back, I couldn't see where I was goin', so that log I fell over took me completely by surprise. I sat up and turned around (which was a little difficult with Domino climbin' all over me) just in time to watch that space ship rise up off the ground about ten feet like it was a helium balloon. It hung there in the air about ten feet off the ground, just long enough to pull its four legs up inside. Then that metal ball rose straight up, movin' faster every second. It was outta sight in less than a minute.

I sat there for a minute or two, tryin' to figure out what had happened; the hummin' space ship, the man-alien, the frog-alien, the yellow fog—some of it made sense, and some of it didn't, especially the yellow fog.

Well, anyhow, Domino starts barkin' again, so I get on my feet an' get ready for whatever else could be comin', though I didn't think anything could top what'd awready happened. Turned out I was right; it was just the two cops with flashlights. They said somebody in the neighborhood phoned in a complaint about wierd sounds an' bright lights. I gave 'em a short run-down on what happened, even though I knew they wouldn't believe me.

And they didn't. They looked at

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me like I was high on somethin', even after I showed them where the landing pods left prints in the ground. Thay hauled me an' the dog down to the precinct an' I told my story to the desk sergeant an' then he sent me to the shrink to find out what I was high on an' the shrink listened to me an' then called me a pill-popper an' then I screamed a lot 'til they let me have my one phone call.

I called my old man an' he screamed at me a lot over the phone an' got down there faster'n you can blink. It took me a while to convince 'him I was playin' it straight, but when I did, he called you guys . . . You checked out the clearing? . . . An' tracks from the eight-legged thing, too? . . . Well, I hope you'll pardon me if I don't do handsprings. It's only taken half a day to get somebody in a position of authority to believe me. When can I have my clothes back?

. . . No, I don't think they were invaders or ambassadors or explorers or anything like that . . . "Visitors?" Well, only in the way you "visit" a gas station during a long trip from one place to another . . . Okay, I'll tell you what I mean. But you're gonna be disappointed . . . Ya see, I figured out on the way over here what it was all about—the landing, the yellow fog, the whole bit. It was so simple I could kick myself for not seein' it in the first place.

And ya know what the key was? The look on the man-alien's face just before he shut the space ship door. He realized that he an' I were two of a kind. We were both out there for the same reason! ★

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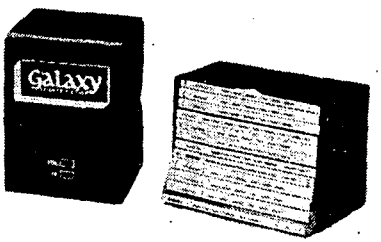

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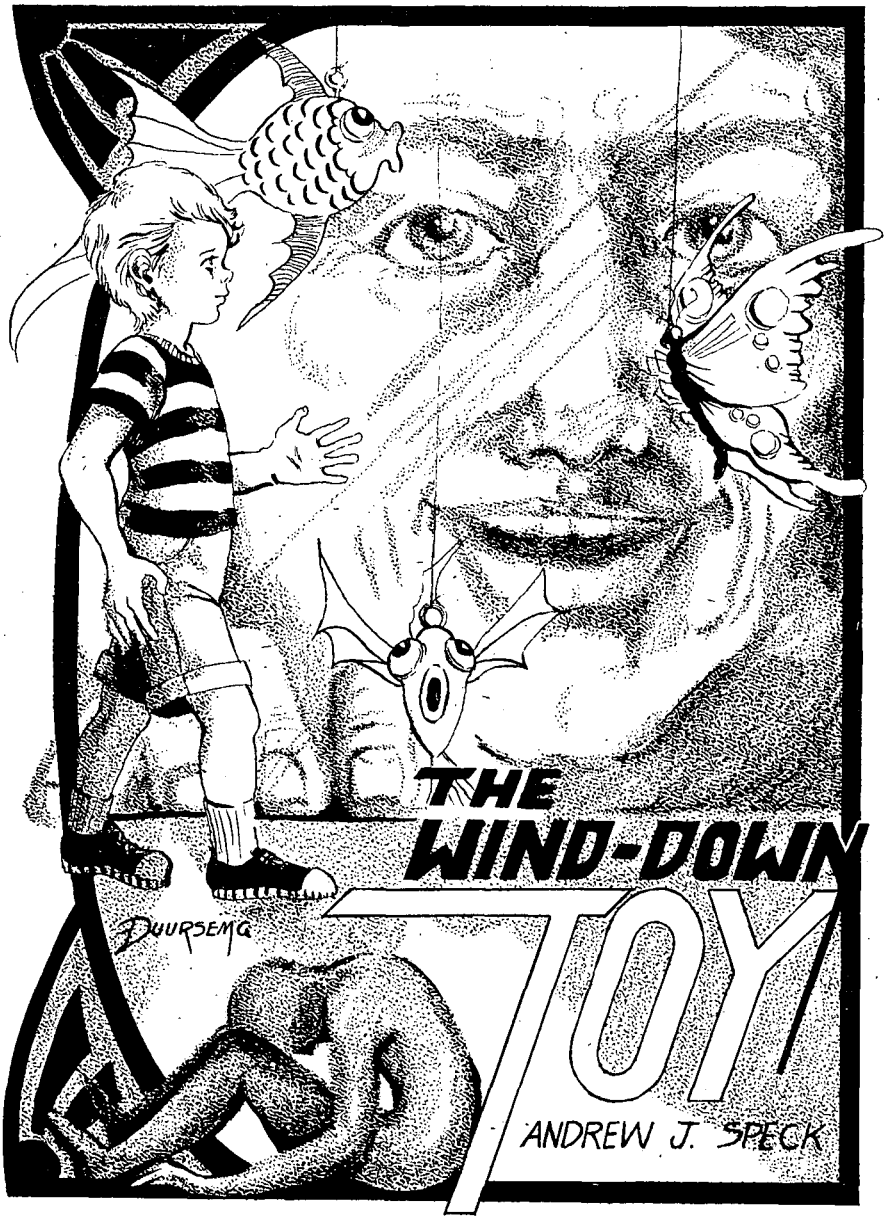

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It was really the *oddest* toy. And the boy who got it never *knew* how odd; not while he was a boy. . . .

A GIFT. A GIFT.

As usual, Martin Selby had waited until the last minute to do his gift shopping. He hated having put it off; he hated doing it at all. Such a nuisance. It seemed there was no time at all between birthdays, holidays, Mother's Day, Father's Day, anniversaries, an illness.

Not that he had anything against gifts. It was just that it was so hard to find something unusual, something different, something that stood out and caught the eye. He was at that time of life when the only gifts he received were socks, ties, shirts and shaving lotion—until his dresser drawers bulged with unusued collections of these things.

So he tramped the streets for hours, determined to find that special something. And he had to admit, ruefully, that the odds were he would go home empty-handed. But that was in his nature. For him it was all or none, double or nothing.

A gift. A gift.

He turned a corner. *Curios,* read the sign on the window. *The Unusual Store For The Unusual Shopper, With That Special Gift You've Been Looking For.*

"Who're you kidding?" he muttered. "You're probably just like all the rest." But for some indefinable reason he hesitated, turned and stared at the sign. "What the hell—"

From the very first he noticed the store's cheerful atmosphere. From the outside it had appeared drab, inconspicuous, as though the owner might have something to hide. But here, inside. . . .

"Well now," he whispered to himself. He had to admit that it was colorful, very colorful. Whoever had arranged it had taste. Glittering mobiles hung from the ceiling, shelves and counters were covered with toys and exhibits. Sweet fragrances filled the air and soft notes chimed in a variety of melodies. the total effect was dazzling. "Like Ali Baba's cave," he thought.

He looked around further.

Fuzzballs, read the sign. *Great for kids!* Fuzzballs? He looked into the plastic cage and saw a number of tiny, furry balls crawling on the floor. Two brown eyes like little brown bubbles stared up from each of the unusual creatures. They looked very soft, very appealing. Fuzzballs?

He moved on. There was a set of long, erect crystals that looked like towers. He inspected them more closely. They resembled castles, rough and crude castles, in a variety of colors.

And then, *The World's Only Musical Seashell!* read the next

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placard. He picked up the shell and put it to his ear. There was the sound of a distant sea murmuring and the happy songs of a Polynesian festivity. For a brief moment he imagined himself adrift in the ocean, eavesdropping on a South Pacific island. He took the shell from his ear, stared at it, shook it and put it back to his ear. Again he heard the ocean's murmur—and something else too: a feminine voice, so sweet, so haunting, that he was scarcely able to put the shell down.

Three chimes struck just then. *Stone Age Clock.* He watched as the crude structure came alive. Beneath the clock dials a caveman and a cavewoman emerged from separate caves. In a stilted minuet they met and the caveman clubbed the woman three times over her head and dragged her into his cave.

Martin laughed, feeling a rising good humor. He moved on. A green candle in the shape of the Statue of Liberty, with torch alight, giving off a refreshing lime odor. . . a miniature chandelier studded with imitation diamonds that sparkled each time he moved . . . *See the World Through Rose-Colored Glasses.*

He picked up the oversized pink glasses—and almost gasped aloud in wonder. The chandelier had become a fiery torch of rubies, the crystal castles glowed in strange, amazing colors. The paintings on the walls seemed to have come to life.

Inexpressibly Martin felt long-forgotten emotions stirring. Memories he thought had died and been lost forever were bursting forth. He remembered once more what it was like to be a child; he remembered what it was like before he had forced upon him the most important thing of all—Getting Ahead.He remembered a world now visible only through rose-colored glasses. And what was wrong with that? Wasn't there something to be said after all, for seeing the better half of life?

"Have you been helped, sir?"

He fumbled with the glasses, hurriedly removing them, realizing how silly he must have looked, staring, gawking, a silly smile on his face.

"Oh, yes, I. . .I'm looking for some presents for my little boy. It's his birthday." He looked down at the short, pixy-like clerk.

"Have you found anything you'd like, sir?"

"Yes, these glasses and. . . " he stared behind her, "that doll—why, it looks just like my little boy." He went over to the doll. *Wind Down Toy,* read the sign at its feet.

He took the doll in his hands. It was no more than ten inches tall. "How do you wind it up? There's no key on its back."

"You can't wind it up, sir. It only winds down."

Martin looked at her with a puzzled expression.

"But it lasts a long time," she assured him, smiling.

He placed it on the floor. Immediately it stepped off with such a lifelike gait that he broke out laughing. "I'll take it!"

Walking on a cloud of enchantment, he set off for home.

"Here you are, Joey. Look at what Daddy brought you for your birthday." He put the oversized glasses on the small, happy face, chuckling as he did so. "You look

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like a big bug, Joey."

The little boy gave a squeal of delight and began running around in circles, peering at everything, stopping, staring; then he dashed out the door, crying in joy as he chased a butterfly through the garden.

"Oh, my, it looks like you've found something he really likes. And what's that?"

Martin glanced at his wife; she seemed to be infected too with high spirits. He opened the box and took out the doll.

"O o o, wherever did you get that? Why, it looks just like Joey! It even has the same clothes on."

Martin looked at the doll. Yes, that was certainly a coincidence. It *was* dressed in the very same clothes. He took the little figure and set it on the floor. Immediately it walked off in a gait similar to his son's and then stopped.

"Why, I've never seen anything like it!" Martin's wife took it in her hands and held it gently, as though she feared she might harm a living being. She touched it and caressed it, feeling nothing more than the soft plastic skin under her fingers. "It's so real—"

"You should see some of the other toys they have, Jean."

"Who has? What was the name of the store?"

Martin thought. "Hm-m-m. I can't remember. But I do remember where it was. We'll have to go there together next weekend—and remind me to get Joey some fuzzballs.

Jean stared at him with a puzzled expression in her eyes.

"Oh, some pets. They're very cute, furry little pets. Joey needs some pets," he said, somewhat embarrassed.

A week later, as he was walking down the street with his wife he told her, ". . . and I just turned this corner," he gestured with outstretched hand, "and there it was." Smiling with anticipation, he looked at his wife, who only stared at him with a puzzled little frown. He turned to the store.

The signs had been removed. All the posters and advertisements were gone. Inside, the store was bare and dusty. He tugged at the locked door.

"Why, this can't be. It was here just a week ago." He looked to the left and the right. "Just a minute, let me check next door."

He returned with a look of disappointment. "The owner left town and didn't leave any forwarding address." Once again he stopped before the empty store and his eyes searched the barren space intently, as though trying to will it back into existence. *Open Sesame!*

His wife took his arm in hers. "That's too bad, dear. I feel like I've missed out on something."

Martin clasped her arm but remained silent. How could he tell her? How could he tell her what it meant to be born again, to be a child again? He looked through the plateglass windown and saw, in his mind's eye, all the beautiful things, all the wondrous treasures of the imagination, Ali Baba's cave. He rememberd a time when life was sheer adventure, awaiting him, and all the world aquiver with newborn magic.

* * *

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"Oh, here are more toys for the children to play with." He opened the chest and reached in. "No sense in throwing them away if they're still good." He picked up one of the old, dusty toys and looked at it closely. "Why, I remember this! My father gave it to me when I was a little boy. Haven't seen it in years; I thought I had lost it."

A little girl came running to his side. "Daddy, Daddy, it looks just like you!"

He looked at the doll again. Yes, it did look remarkably like him. He put it down on the floor and immediately it set off walking.

The little girl laughed in delight. "It walks just like you, Daddy. It walks just like you."

He felt embarrassed; indeed the little doll did walk just as he did. It looked like a little comedian, mocking him.

"What's all the commotion? Oh, my—" The woman fell into peals of laughter, her husband and daughter joining her. "Where did you get it?" she asked.

"My father gave it to me when I was a little boy, Linda." He picked up the doll. "Funny, but I remember it as looking younger and walking faster. I wonder if it's the same doll.

"Rummaging through the trunk, he spotted a flash of pink. "Oh, and here's something else for Patty to play with."

He took the rose-colored glasses in his hands and put them on. "No mistaking these." The old magic returned immediately, sending the world a cheerful kaleidoscope shimmering with each turn of his hand. "Here, Patty, you try them on."

Joe placed the glasses on her face. Linda chuckled; their little girl was like a pink bug-eyed bug.

"Gee!" Patty looked around the room, ran to the door, stopped, stared—and dashed out of the house with squeals of delight.

* * *

"Tell me a story, Granpa. Tell me a story."

The old man held the little girl in his arms. "A fairy tale?"

"Yes, Granpa, a fairy tale."

"Oh, let's see. Once upon a time. . . once upon a time they lived happily ever after."

The little girl stared blankly, then slapped at his hand. "Aw, that's no fairy tale, Granpa Joey."

"I've got a better idea, Amy. Let's sing a song." He stood up and walked slowly and stiffly to the piano. "Come over here and sit on Granpa's lap."

The little girl settled herself and joined the old man as he struck the keys and sang:

My grandfather's clock was too large for the shelf
So it stood ninety years on the floor.
It was taller by half than the old man himself
Though it weighed not a pennyweight more.
It was bought on the morn of the day that he was born
And was always his treasure and pride.
But it stopped short, never to go again,
When the old man died. . . .

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When they stopped singing, the old man said, "And now, Amy, since it's your birthday and since you've been such a good girl, Granpa has a surprise for you." He opened an old, battered box and took out a little doll. "When Granpa was a very little boy, this was a present his father gave him."

The little girl's eyes widened. When Granpa was a little boy!

He set the doll on its feet and immediately it walked off in a slow shuffle, its back bent.

"Gosh, Granpa, it looks just like you! And it walks just like you!" Amy took the small figure in her hands and her fingers searched along its back. "Where do you wind it up?"

The old man studied the doll intently; it seemed as though he finally had a long-sought for answer. "You can't wind it up, Amy; it's a wind-down toy. It winds only one way and when it winds all the way down and stops, you can never wind it up again."

Then he reached down into the box and pulled out the rose-colored glasses. "And here's another present for you." He put the glasses on and again the old magic returned, as vivid as ever. He looked through the glasses for a long, long time before removing them, his hands trembling, his eyes moist. Behind over, he carefully put them on the little girl's nose.

"Oh!"

Then he took Amy's face between his hands and kissed her forehead. "Do you know why your Granpa likes to play with you? Because when he's with you, it's like looking at the world through rose-colored glasses—everything's pretty again."

"But isn't everything always pretty, Granpa?"

"No. When you grow up, you'll look at some things again and they won't seem pretty any more. But when I'm with you, everything is pretty. Now. . . take these toys and go play. Your Granpa's going to take a rest."

The little girl ran from the room, put the doll aside and began to dash about in circles, peering at everything, stopping, staring—and then she dashed out the door, crying in delight as she chased a butterfly through the garden.

When she returned, she took the doll in her hands and set it on its feet. The toy fell backward and lay very still. "Come on, dolly, walk." Again and again she placed it on its feet—and each time the doll fell backward and lay motionless.

She ran to her grandfather's room. "Granpa, Granpa."

He lay motionless on the bed and gave no answer.

"Granpa." She ran to the bed and tugged on her grandfather's arm. "Granpa, Granpa Joey."

But he said nothing, and his arm felt cold and stiff.

The little girl pulled her hand away, her eyes large and bewildered as she stared at the figure lying motionless on the bed.

Slowly she backed out of the room. Suddenly the house seemed very silent.

Then she ran off, calling in a soft voice, "Granma, Granma, the wind-down toy stopped. The wind-down toy stopped, Granma. Granma. . . ." ★

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GALAXY BOOKSHELF

Paul Walker

Nebula Winners Twelve, ed. by Gordon R. Dickson, Harper and Row, 1978, 242pp., $9.95

False Dawn, Chelsea Quinn Yarbro, Doubleday, 1978, 208pp., $7.95

The Hostage of Zir, L. Sprague de Camp, Berkley/Putnam, 213pp., $7.95

Fantasy by Fabian, Gerry de la Ree, 1978, 128pp., $15.00

100 Great Science Fiction Short Short Stories, Isaac Asimov, Martin Harry Greenberg, and Joseph D. Olander, Doubleday, 1978, 271pp., $8.95

Dickson's Dozen

Of the Nebula Award volumes I have read, I found *Nebula Winners Twelve* by Gordon R. Dickson the most tolerable. It has two excellent stories: "In the Bowl" by John Varley, and "The Bicentennial Man" by Isaac Asimov; and two equally good essays, "Science Fiction in the Marketplace" by Algirdas (Algis) Budrys and "The Academic Viewpoint" by James Gunn.

The Varley story I have reviewed before. It is not his best, but pretty good. The Asimov, however, is breathtaking, if only because it has been so long since I read a good Asimov story I had forgotten how good he can be. It is probably the last of the "I, Robot" series, and the equal of any of them. A fascinating, moving tale of a robot who wishes to be human.

This is not a novel idea, but Asimov's handling of it is brilliant. We are first introduced to "Andrew" as he is applying to a

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robot surgeon for an operation the machine fears will harm him. We learn that Andrew is a robot. The story flashes back to Andrew the machine. He is in service to a family with whom he has developed a close relationship, one that is to last their entire lives. It is discovered that Andrew has a special talent for making things. He is encouraged to try furniture, and he does so well at it he makes a fortune.

At this point, he comes to his owner with a special request: he wants to buy his freedom. The owner is bewildered, but willing. The law, however, must be convinced. And after a court case, they are. Andrew is free.

He finds that his freedom involves risks. There are no laws to protect the rights of a free robot from unscrupulous human beings. A bill is introduced into the legislature with the aid of Andrew's wealth, and again, he wins.

Afterwards, he virtually invents the science of robobiology in an effort to transform himself into a human being; an act that requires another legislative battle before it is won.

The story is really a series of short-shorts, nicely woven together. What makes them fascinating is the careful evolution of Andrew's thinking from machine to man. Asimov has not simply taken a human character and called him a robot, but made Andrew wonderfully different and only gradually human. Part of his success depends on the constant contrast between him and his human family. They are not complex people, but warm and alive. As intricate as the philosophical and legal aspects of the story become, Asimov never loses the story's humanity. Nor is anything assumed. If this were to be the first robot story you had read, you would not be confused by any of the terminology.

Less than first-rate is Charles L. Grant's award-winning, "A Crowd of Shadows." To me, this is a typical "award-winner," the kind of story people like Damon Knight and Harlan Ellison point to as evidence of science fiction's maturation, the kind that is supposed to be comparable to anything in the mainstream.

The narrator is an average, liberal-minded man who is vacationing on a resort world called Starburst. He meets an android in the shape of a boy whom he believes belongs to an elderly couple. The other guests are hostile to androids. The narrator is sympathetic, enraged at their bigotry. A series of murders occur, and the boy is suspected (for good reason). The guests become fearful and angry. Any one of them might be next. The narrator comes to share their hostility. One night the boy is killed on the beach by some men. It is discovered he is really human. The elderly couple are androids. They were his surrogate parents.

Aside from calling the boy an android, we are told nothing about the nature of androids. Their existence is assumed; their wonder and mystery irrelevant to Grant's theme. Normal people are prejudiced against androids. Why?

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Grant never tells us. The murders, committed by the boy, I imagine, have nothing to do with androids, or with the time and place of the story. They are acts of protest against an unfeeling world. The world itself is hardly described. It could as well as be Miami Beach. In short, change "android" to black, and the time of the story to twenty years ago, and you have the same story.

As in most "award-winners," neither the theme nor the characters are in any way remarkable. By contrast with the Asimov story, one might say that Grant's narrative technique is more sophisticated (i.e., more literary), but while both are working with familiar materials, Asimov's style makes them seem fresh and alive, while Grant's does not.

The same is true, to a lesser extent, of Joe Haldeman's "Tricentennial" and Thomas F. Monteleone's "Breath's a Ware that Will Not Keep." Both have familiar ideas given sophisticated literary treatment. Haldeman gives us a snapshot view of the narrative in short sequences dating from 1975 to 2093, when the first starship reaches a distant world, thereby saving humanity from extinction. As with most Haldeman stories, we are left beaming with admiration at his extraordinary skill, but with no memory whatever of the characters.

The Monteleone story is about an intelligent machine that goes berserk; or, more profoundly, about the relationship of man and machine: who is ultimately more human? Seems to have been a popular question in 1977. It provides a few suspenseful moments, but made no impact on me.

Finally, there is James Tiptree, Jr.'s "Houston, Houston, Do You Read?"—which I could not.

Gordon R. Dickson's introduction is intelligent and interesting, if typical of these anthologies: "Hurray for Science Fiction!" According to Dickson, sf is the freest of all genre forms because it has no definite form, and therefore it is indefinable. It isn't. Science fiction has its limits like any other genre, but they cannot be defined in terms of plot structure as can the mystery, but in terms of story elements. A science fiction story can have any plot structure as long as the integrity of the science fiction elements is preserved. Compare the Asimov and Grant stories. A science fiction story could well be plotless, as is *Mission of Gravity*, more or less. It is the elements themselves—time-travel, alien worlds, robots, future societies etc.—that are the real source of drama in a science fiction story, not the story itself.

This is why I disagree with Budrys's tsk-tsking of the predominance of story-oriented sf in the marketplace. So little genuine hard science fiction, like "The Bicentennial Man," or *Mission of Gravity*, is written, that stories are the best the reader has to expect from the field.

If we read a writer like James Jones, it is not because we like war novels necessarily, but because we like Jones. We don't even think of *From Here to Eternity* as "a war novel." But if we read a writer like

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Budrys, it is because we like science fiction. And even if he is our favorite writer, we read him as much for the sake of the experience of science fiction as for his own sake. In fact, it is his ability to communicate that experience so well that is surely the reason he is our favorite writer.

If we read science fiction writers primarily because we love science fiction, it is the identity of science fiction, then, that is essential to us. We must be able to define it to ourselves, and the more distinct our definition, the more acute will be our pleasure in it.

James Gunn's "The Academic Viewpoint" is a defense of sf classes. He is not so concerned with defining the genre as he is with giving the students critical criteria with which to judge individual works. As a means of teaching criticism, it is interesting. But what does it have to say of science fiction?

I can think of no better reason for a mature adult to read science fiction than because he or she enjoys it. Non-fiction is a much better source of ideas; the better mainstream literature is a considerably superior source of aesthetic pleasure. All the science fiction experience has to offer is itself. The experience of alien worlds and new technologies and far future adventures. For those who love it, it is enough.

Yarbro's Falsie

In my review of Chelsea Quinn Yarbro's *Hotel Transylvania,* I said I felt she would never amount to anything as a writer unless she developed a better dramatic sense, as well as a better sense of proportion. It is my pleasure to report that in her latest novel, *False Dawn,* she shows tremendous progress in both directions.

It is exciting, suspenseful, colorful, and often tender. A book that is hard to put down.

The scene is post-holocaust America, the west. A series of disasters has compounded our chronic pollution problems to eliminate most of humanity. There are plagues and famines. Endemic birth defects. Whole areas blanketed in lethal gases. Wild dogs run through the city streets. Venomous water spiders infest the lakes and rivers. There are colonies of mutants and lepers. And the weather itself has turned against us. A new ice age is dawning.

Thea is alone. A viral mutation, designed to survive in this hostile world, and hopefully to save mankind with her offspring. She is making her way to Gold Spring where she has heard there is a refuge. An army of marauding hoodlums called the Pirates are the last organized force in the land. They spend their time pillaging towns and cities, exterminating "mutes," as well as everyone else who gets in their way.

Thea meets Evan Montague, the founder, and former head of the Pirates, who has been deposed by a blood-thirsty rival. It was Evan's hope that the Pirates might restore order, but his wish to save the mutes was opposed, and he had his arm cut off with a buzzsaw and was left to die. What his rival did not

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know was that Evan, himself, was a mute. His arm, in time, grew back.

Thea and Evan team up and struggle to reach Gold Spring. Aside from the ever-menacing Pirates, they are opposed by a homicidal cop, packs of wild dogs, a cannibalistic old woman, an order of monastic fanatics who would burn them alive, and the cold of the winter. The last obstacle, the threat of freezing to death and slow-starvation, is the most harrowing of all.

Dramatically, it is a consistently engrossing novel. Gone is the excess verbiage and unnecessary detail that made her last two novels tedious. Scenes are graphically described. Perhaps, to excess here and there, but the effect is gripping and not vulgar. Both Thea and Evan are characters worth caring about; and their opponents, with few exceptions, are realized vividly. Their journey is an arduous one, and Yarbro makes us feel for them every step of the way. Their relationship is treated sensitively. Their growing feeling for one another: their initial fear, their increased respect, and finally their love is handled beautifully. This is no stock-company romance between two stereotypes.

Proportionately, there is a problem.

From the moment a character comes on the scene, the reader begins visualizing him. If the character the reader is to visualize is to be the same one the writer envisioned, the writer must give all the pertinent information about the character as soon as possible. Yarbro does not do this. We don't get all the facts about Evan and Thea until the last half of the book, and by that time, it is hard to reconcile them with their present characters. In fact, it is consistently hard to reconcile all the facts of the story.

For instance, how many Pirates are there? Yarbro, at first, gives the impression that they are a nation-wide army; and yet in the end, Thea and Evan fight off a handful. And how did the world come to its pathetic end, anyway? She talks of pollution, and a series of man-made disasters, and plagues, but it is unclear how all this added up to doomsday. It is even unclear where they are. In a preface she says the reader may follow their route on a map, but as the country is unfamiliar to anyone who doesn't live there, I was very confused. The publishers might have included a map.

Thea, as I said, is a viral mutation. A product of a center that attempted to breed a new kind of humanity to cope with the disaster, but it is never clear in what way she is a mutant (except for a nictating membrane which descends at the most inappropriate moments), or how this was supposed to save her, or who the people of the center were, and what happened to them.

Evan is the son of a famous conductor. Brilliant, well-read, well-traveled. He lost his parents in a cholera epidemic in London. But it is never clear how he got home again, or how he became head of the Pirates. Nor is it clear how his rival took over, and why he left him with his arm cut off and didn't finish the job. Nor is it clear why

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he is a mutant with the capacity to regrow an arm.

But the book's greatest weakness is its lack of originality. Anyone familiar with the post-holocaust stories of the 50's—and God knows, there were hundreds of them—will find no surprises. It is the same landscape, only this time it is pollution instead of radiation. The same marauding bands, the same wild dogs, the same leper colonies, even the same religious fanatics. And Thea and Evan are pretty much the same hero and heroine. Even the names, "Pirates," "Mutes," etc. are the same.

It is still fun to read, and the pollution-angle does give it a certain freshness, but I would hope this doesn't revive the genre.

Still, it is interesting to speculate on the appeal of this kind of story. Sf fans are supposed to be an optimistic lot, and yet nothing could be more depressing than an end of the world story. The final sentences of *False Dawn* suggest there is no hope. Humanity will vanish as if it had never existed.

The point is worth considering, but has been considered so often, by so many different talents, over so many years, there must be more basic kinds of appeal to the story.

I can see a number of them. For one thing, the end of the world results in a restoration of the Wild West, the frontier. Hardly the virgin land, but a hostile, alien landscape in which human fortitude is tested, and values regenerated. In many of these stories, mankind is saved by a community of technicians (see *Time Storm* or *Lucifer's Hammer*) who

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practice a utilitarian ethic.

In other types (such as *Rebirth*), humanity is saved by spectacular mutations which promise a new age for humanity. Always they are cerebral mutations, of course.

These stories possibly reflect the belief shared by many intellectuals that man is a fallen angel, but rather than a fall from spiritual grace, he has fallen from rationalism. His culture has succumbed to commercialism, greed, the lust for power, and religion.

The post-disaster story is, then, a second chance for humanity. A chance to separate the strong from the weak; a chance to rebuild the world along scientific guidelines. Or a chance to re-make a hopelessly inadequate mankind into a cerebral superman.

In any case, it is a reduction of the world as we know it to its most basic terms: social darwinism.

In another light, it is a microcosm of the alienated adolescent's view of the world. Exactly the kind of adolescent who is most likely to read science fiction. The world is a hostile place filled with cruelty and ignorance, ideally suited for "mundanes," mundanes being anyone not like themselves, especially physical types—who are always stupid, bigoted bullies; as are all religious people fanatics, all businessmen grasping, and all military types fascists. They, themselves, of course, are the exceptions. Their personifications physically, as well as intellectually, differ, making them a target of discrimination. But their differences are really gifts, for they are very special people possessed of keen minds and acute insights, especially into the nature of power. They are people born to do great deeds.

All disaster stories are quests for a place to belong. Two or more gifted people make their way heroically across a hostile landscape to a special place where their own specialness will be allowed fruition, for their quest for belonging is also a quest for efficacy. A place where their opinions, formerly scorned by the world, are viewed as wisdom, where their abilities, formerly neglected or suppressed by the world, are spectacularly successful.

This is, perhaps, less true today than it was in the 50's. Fans tend to be older today than they were then. Possibly adolescence lasts longer today than it did then. And they are less optimistic. Thea and Evan never find their special place. All that is left to them at the end of Chelsea Quinn Yarbro's *False Dawn* is their love for one another.

I wouldn't mind at all if this book got a Hugo nomination.

L. Sprague of Camp

As I've said before, a form revitalizes itself by making new combinations of its elements. Use of the form for satire, or parody, suggest the form is decadant; but humor is a method for making familiar elements seem fresh. The problem with a humorous treatment is that it is a dead-end. Once the humor wears thin, there are no possibilities to build on, because the humor is derived from a demonstration of the limitations of the form. For instance, you can only use a phony magician, or a

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cowardly dragon, or an incompetent knight so often before their novelty wears off, and then you can't make an about-face and introduce a real magician, a genuinely fearsome dragon, and a Lancelot to carry on, because they contradict your initial premise.

The same is true of the "novice hero among the barbarians" theme, which was introduced by Burroughs, and was never very good to begin with. It is based on the English class sytem idea of the superiority of the upper crust, and it never traveled well to America. Here we worship the cult of the professional.

Examples of what I have been talking about undermine the success of L. Sprague de Camp's *The Hostage of Zir*, the first Krishna novel in over a decade.

The hero, Fergus Reith, is a former desk jockey who has been given the job as the first tour guide for Krishna by the Magic Carpet Travel Agency. He has never been away from Earth before, never wielded a sword, or had an adventure; but he is to endure all of them before the novel is over: escape a fanatic mob, have two duels with irate giants, be captured by bandits, and flee two beautiful young women, one of whom would make him a god, the other, a bridegroom. His charges include a black militant, two homosexuals, a nymphomania, and an all-around troublemaker.

It sounds like a lively trip, and it is, at least at the beginning, but it wears thin by mid-point and becomes tedious by the end. The elements are overly familiar: Fergus Reith is no more convincing as a super-hero than any other; his charges are no more than amusing types, and rather offensively treated; his aliens are, like virtually all the elements in the book, comic book caricatures. De Camp's humor alone saves the book from disaster, but the humor itself is familiar, a debunking of religion and authority and magic.

The title itself, *The Hostage of Zir*, is misleading in that it is only one small episode in a book that is wholly episodic. And that is the principal reason for the novel's weakness: it never amounts to anything more than a string of encounters.

The Krishna series was begun back in (I believe) 1949, with *The Queen of Zamba*,' a serial in *Astounding*, that has recently been re-issued by Davis Publications (A Dale Book). The rest of the stories, considerably superior to *The Hostage of Zir*, can be found in *The Continent Makers* (Signet, 1971). Two other Krishna novels, The Hand of Zei and *The Tower of Zanid*, also appeared back in the 50's. They are worth trying, although I found some of them tedious for reasons I explained at the beginning. De Camp tends to tell the same joke over and over.

Nevertheless, it has been a popular series, and I would not be surprised if *The Hostage of Zir* is welcomed with applause.

Q.: Who likes short-shorts?
A.: Asimov likes short-shorts.

In his usual lively introduction, Isaac Asimov makes the following

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points about the short story: "The longer the story, the more the author can spread himself . . . can indulge himself in plot and subplot with intricate interconnections . . . can engage in leisurely description, in careful character delineation, in thoughtful homilies, and philosophical discussions." But, he says, every story must have a point. "The reader may not consciously search for it, but he'll miss it if it isn't there." In the short-short story, however, "there can be no subplots . . . no time for philosophy; what description and character delineation there is must be accomplished with concision . . . everything is eliminated *but* the point."

And that last point is well-attested to in the majority of the *100 Great Science Fiction Short Short Stories* edited by Asimov, Martin Harry Greenberg, and Joseph D. Olander.

The question arises, of course, if everything is eliminated except the point, what can the point consist of? The answer is a punch line.

Asimov's own story, "A Loint of Paw," is a good illustration. A man steals over —$100,000 and is apprehended the day after the statute of limitations has expired. What he did was to take the money, step into a time machine, and emerge seven years and one day after the event.

The District Attorney claims "that the statute of limitations was not intended to be a game, (but) a merciful measure designed to protect a culprit from indefinitely prolonged fear of arrest." As the villain has experienced no such fear, and is, in fact, only one day older than when he committed the crime, he should be judged guilty.

The villain's attorney argues that the letter of the law should apply.

The decision is left with the judge, who in a suspenseful moment, delivers his verdict in a hilarious Asimovian pun. End of story.

Everything has, indeed, been eliminated. There is no attempt to characterize the villain, or elicit the readers' sympathy for him, except by demonstration of his ingenuity. There is no scientific justification of time travel. Simply, problem and resolution.

But, as the story involves no emotional interaction, so the point involves no emotional drama. The story is a joke; the point, the punch line. We laugh, and go on to the next.

As the punch line is a funny one, we forgive Asimov for deceiving us into thinking he was writing a serious story; we forget our intellectual expectations, and we accept the story for what it is, not really a story at all, but an exercise in anarchy.

The point of a short story, as in a novel, involves the fulfillment of our expectations: positive, when the hero wins, negative, when he loses. These expectations are the work of the writer: he puts them into our minds, and their resolution almost always involves a moral. But when a writer contradicts his own created expectations, the effect is of anarchy, either for the sake of humor or philosophy. The moral is lost; all sense of human drama is gone; the point is an abstraction,

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and therefore we don't think whether the villain of Asimov's story was right or wrong, or the judge's decision flippant under the circumstances, or wonder what will happen next. The story has been frozen into a pun that ends all further consideration of dramatic possibility. We are left with nothing but admiration for the writer's ingenuity.

This is pleasant for a time, but the repeated experience of it is boring, which is why the effect of the majority of these stories is boring. It comes to seem more like a joke book than anything else.

There are, of course, more skillful comedians than Asimov. Niven's examples here are wonderful, especially "Mistake," or Roger Zelazny's hilarious "Collector's Fever," or Joe L. Hensley's "Argent Blood." None are such blatant examples of anarchic humor as Asimov's. All contain sufficient background and characterization. And there are many more fine examples of what can be done with the form: Ambrose Bierce's savage "The Ingenious Patriot," Ben Bova's only slightly less savage, "The System," which should be required reading for all "ingenious patriots," and "Zoo" by Edward D. Hoch, which, while it is very amusing, makes a very real point about how we look at one another.

But as good as these are, the effect of this type of story is wearing, even if you only read a few of them at a time. Nor are there a sufficient number of serious stories as were to be found in the book of short-shorts that Asimov did with Groff Conklin years ago. There are a few such as Roger Zelazny's chilling "Corrida," or Joanna Russ' lovely "Innocence." Both are brief, relying heavily on suggestion. But, for me, the best example of what can be done with the short-short is Jerome Bixby's "Trace."

It is not an anecdote or a joke, but a complete story with the point left for the reader to discern. A man takes a wrong turn on a country road and winds up in a lonely valley. He finds a house and a kindly old hermit who takes him in. The situation is thoroughly familiar. The mystery is the nature of the kindly old hermit. But rather than playing it for laughs or shock effect, Bixby maintains a restraint, feeding us subtle and ominous lines. The man leaves the house unaware of who the old man was or what an extraordinary experience he has had.

Suggestion and subtlety are the real tests of the excellence of a short-short story. With them, a writer can do as much as he can do in a much longer story, but few possess that kind of talent. The short-short is the most common trap for amateurs, as any slush pile reader can tell you. Its success involves a concentration of dramatic elements that is almost always beyond their abilities. Yet, to judge from this book, most professionals misjudge the form as readily. The result is that they write "fillers" rather than stories.

While I liked many of them, I don't think I would recommend *100 Great Science Fiction Short Stories* as a book. The editors could have

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done far better by the form. I wish someone would.

Of Mammaries and Monsters

So far in this column, I have delved intrepidly into the artwork of Kelly Freas and Edd Cartier, and now I am about to embark on another coffee table safari into the wiles and wilds of *Fantasy by Fabian*, edited by Gerry de la Ree. Hardly enough data with which to concoct a theory of genre art. Nevertheless, I am learning.

Like the western, fantasy is a literature whose success is dependent on its images. This is true of science fiction as well, but in a somewhat different way. In the western, it is the landscape that is the controlling reality. Its nature is such that the people who inhabit it seem to have sprung from it suitably clothed and equipped. In both fantasy and science fiction, the landscape is that of the mind rather than of the earth.

The difference between them is the art of science fiction is an art of conscious, intellectual wonder; while that of fantasy is of the subconscious, dreamlike: an objectification of the unknown.

Of the three artists, Cartier and Fabian are essentially decorative. Their work is immediate. Their images do not comment on life. There is little internal drama in them. For Cartier, the world is a whimsical fairyland; for Fabian, it has no predominant scheme. His work is imitative—a little Finlay here, a little Cartier there—but not uninteresting.

In serious art or literature, the intention is to share a perception of reality that reconciles, or demonstrates the complexity, of the intellectual and emotional aspects of experience. In fantasy art, it is the experience itself that is the message. It is a shared dream, intended to arouse a specific and familiar feeling. In this, fantasy has the advantage over science fiction in that its images have an ancient tradition and a greater variety of appeals. Fantasy art can appeal to primitive fears and anxieties as well as childhood whimsy; science fiction art is bound to the intellect and the imagination. We cannot wonder unless we think about what we see.

Fantasy is an objectification of the unknown, but that could be qualified by saying it is more accurately an objectification of the familiar unknown; those aspects of it such as ghosts, ghouls, and graveyards. It is their familiarity, rather than their novelty, that makes them interesting. A child looks at a monster, and sees what he believes to be a real creature, and therefore a threat. A more experienced child looks at a monster and sees a toy. The former experiences real fear; the latter, the detensified memory of fear. The former perceives reality; the latter ingenuity. He knows that the artist is trying to scare him, but he is not frightened, and yet he would like to be, within safe limits; so his perception becomes a collaboration with the artist, the success of which depends on the talent of the artist.

Sex is as much an unknown as anything supernatural. Even to those familiar with it, it is a mysterious

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and disturbing power. Yet for all its very real terrors (impotence, illegitimacy, perversion, etc.), it is an irresistable source of wonder. Until recently, it has shared a kinship with fantasy in that society feared it as something unnatural, except in a specific context, and then by prescribed rules. For the adolescent, it seemed as if sex occupied another level of reality, a strange and mysterious place far removed from the everyday world. And, for the average adult, the situation was not much different. Sexual activity was so restricted that much of one's sexual energy *had* to be expended in fantasy.

It is not surprising, then, that virtually all of Fabian's women are adolescent sexual fantasies. His book begins with a series he did for Gerry de La Ree, a portfolio of "Fantastic Nudes." All the women are from the same cloth: long-haired, virtually all blonde, full-lips, penciled eyebrows, and with enormous bosoms, nipples erect, as if they were breast-feeding a child. Their faces are characterless. Typical pin-ups. There is usually a phallic symbol of some kind in the background, a sword or spear. A great muscular hero looks on sternly. The women sit in submissive postures intended to represent sensual appeal, but looking no more than like models posing.

No matter. The adolescents who will admire them will see no more than their breasts and ample buttocks. There is no reality, no real sensuousness, to intrude or disturb. Arousal is all.

Next follows an alphabet with Lovecraft images and quotations. I liked some of them very much (the cat of page 44 and the pilgrims of page 45 are marvelous, although the two other cat drawings in the book, familiars both, are more adorable than menacing); but for the rest, they are uneven, and often bland.

There are his illustrations for "The Fire-Fiend," a 19th century poetic hoax of Poe. They are talented and amusing, but two-dimensional and unaffecting. The first, an exterior of the house, however, is perhaps the best drawing in the book, a marvelous mood piece. Fabian is better at landscapes and buildings than he is at people.

Following is a selection of drawings of Helen de la Ree, Gerry's wife, in various fantasy settings, which are completely uninteresting; more alphabet art based on Finlay; and finally the most consistently interesting portion of the book, illustrations from *Invocation*, a quarterly fantasy magazine, which are published here for the first time. More bosomy vamps, but in a surprising variety of styles and images, the best of which can be seen on the back cover.

It is not fair to judge Stephen Fabian's work from this one book, which is not representative, but only a collection of what the editor had on hand; but from what I have seen of his work, the secret of his great popularity remains a mystery to me.

Fantasy by Fabian edited by Gerry de la Ree may be had by writing to Gerry de La Ree, 7 Cedarwood Lane, Saddle River, N.J. 07458. The price is $15.00, no shipping and handling charge. ★

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DIRECTIONS

Dear Sir:

An attitude like Harlan Ellison's is the attempt to achieve by force and boycott what has not been achieved by the will of the people. This is not the idea that science fiction fans should share or, I believe, do share.

Furthermore, if he were to speak under these conditions this would be exploited as 'support' for this type of view regardless of the view of the convention at large.

Thus a substitute should be found as Guest of Honor. I might suggest Sam Nicholson whose story, "More Deadly Than the Male?" in the *Analog Yearbook* viewed Women's Lib very intelligently. In any case there must be time for opposing viewpoints.

While he, like anyone, has and has had the right to express his views, he has no right to drag along an entire convention with him.

Donald Lee Stephens

6218 North 31st St.
Arlington, Va. 22207

I wouldn't want to see Harlan eliminated as guest of honor; I'm sure the fans want to see him—but you're certainly free to show up in Phoenix and argue with him. One word of warning, though: unless you're Lester del Rey, your chances of winning an argument with Harlan are slim or none! —j.j.p.

Dear Sirs:

Harlan Ellison is a gentleman I admire above all others. I've admired his writing for years. When I met him at that fiasco in Tucson last year I was impressed by the fact that he was articulate, witty, principled, and not *that* short. However, his intent concerning the Iguanacon leaves me feeling uncomfortable. My gut reation was that Harlan is capitalizing on the drawing power of his name to espouse a favorite cause, much like Jane Fonda, John Lennon and—yes—Robert Heinlein.

I was distraut when Heinlein acted as he did at the Tucson Exposition. The fact that Heinlein (one of sf's few true giants), in refusing to grant autographs to any who had not donated blood, was, in a sense coercing me and my fannish lusts. Objectivist that I am; I was quite reasonably outraged and got along with a few photographs. Please realize that I understand why Heinlein supports blood donorship so zealously, as it saved his life.

I also understand Harlan's position, as well as his feelings. There are too few solidly principled individuals left in the world for me to actually condemn him, but I don't feel that his intended actions are appropriately inflicted on a Worldcon. The Worldcon has developed into a respected and venerable science fiction institution and should not be used as a personal soap-box. It's as appalling as Venessa Redgrave's tacky bit of bullshit at the Oscars.

Alas, I am left in a dilemma. While I respect and agree with Harlan's sentiments in this issue, I will not allow myself to partake of this particular cup of tea. This saddens me because the Iguanacon was to be the first Worldcon accessible enough for me to afford to at-

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tend, and I can't see choosing between violating my principles and spending a week in a tent. So I guess I'll just have to wait for next year and hope I can make it to London.

Gary L. Day

Post Office Box 1135
Amarillo, Texas 79105

Well, your willingness to forgo Iguanacon on principle is no doubt admirable. And what will Harlan make of that? —*j.j.p.*

Dear Mr. Pierce:

It was with dismay and sadness that I read Harlan Ellison's guest editorial in the May '78 *Galaxy*.

I have had very great respect for Ellison's remarkable ability as a fantasist in the past. He is without doubt one of the really great writers of speculative fantasy. He most certainly deserves the honor of being chosen WorldCon Guest of Honor. His courage and honesty are well known and his enormous talent is universally respected.

However, this time Ellison is dead wrong. Not that he isn't absolutely right about the importance of the passage of ERA. I, too, believe in the amendment and hope that it will pass. But this is not the way to help it! Might I also state that I think it to be in especially bad taste for Ellison to compare his action to that of Heinlein. They are not related at all.

Doesn't Ellison realize that by his making the WorldCon a political platform to publicize his personal beliefs (even though most of us in fact agree with those same beliefs), he is using his fans?

This is one long-time fan of his that wants to register the fact that he most strongly resents it.

William O'Connor

6035 Broadway: 3C
Bronx, N.Y., 10471

So far, the nays seem to have it.— —*j.j.p.*

Dear J.J.:

An open response to Mr. Paul Walker, your book reviewer, on pp. 139-40 of the May 1978 column. In specific, his comments re my story "Basilisk" in Joe Haldeman's anthology STUDY WAR NO MORE; comments that go beyond the parameters of the work and slop over untidily into an analysis of the author. Risky business, that.

I'm not certain one should bother giving serious attention to the opinions of a man who has the *chutzpah* to say of Gordon Dickson—author of "Dolphin's Way," "Black Charlie," "Call Him Lord" and "Home from the Shore" to name only four of the more breathtakingly damned-near-perfect stories this genuinely original talent has given us over the past three decades—and I quote directly:

> ". . . a writer for whom I had previously had no respect for [sic] whatever. . ."

and who says something that uninformed that ungrammatically, but since Mr. Walker has had either the bad luck or the stupidity, or both, to call me out on a subject where I am the only living authority . . . the delicious opportunity

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to kick a cripple is beyond my meager capacity for restraint.

(It wasn't bad grammar, at least, on Paul's part, but a typo that got past me. —j.j.p.)

The subject is, of course, what I think.

Now I realize it will dismay Mr. Walker to learn that his powers of telepathy are impaired, but when it comes to his putting words and thoughts into my mind, or extracting them from that itny place, he is filled right up to the eyeballs with ripe horse puckey. In short, what I'm saying is that Mr. Walker's analysis of "Basilisk," and by extension the motivating sensibility that produced that story, is purest twaddle. Amphigory, rot, tosh, nonsense.

As a card-carrying, dues-paying member in good standing of the National Book Critics Circle, it is my pleasure to give Mr. Walker a much-needed lesson in how to review a book. Excuse my humility. I take it as a public service. Social work among the intellectually deprived. Pay attention, Mr. Walker, and kindly stop moving your lips when you read.

Let us begin the disembowelment working from the lesser to the greater. First your analysis of the story itself. Oh my.

Setting aside the tardiness of Mr. Walker's attention to "Basilisk," a story first published in 1972 (to rather substantial critical praise), reprinted many times, and reviewed favorably as one of the cycle-stores in *Deathbird Stories* (1975, 76), and presuming Mr. Walker has read none of the academic studies of this particular work (notably Slusser's five-page analysis in the Borgo Press 1977 monograph on my work, pp. 38-42), it is clear from internal evidence that Mr. Walker simply does not understand what the story is about.

"Basilisk" concerns itself, thematically, with the valid limits of institutionalized patriotism, with the limits of self-sacrifice a soldier should set for himself, with the fickle nature of the national pride a soldier serves as opposed to that nation's treatment of the *person* upon his return from battle, and most specifically how love of country can be turned to hate when the soldier receives not approbation for his efforts but ostracism and revilement. Mr. Walker sees this story as a diatribe, racist in tone. As he puts it: "The race . . . is White Anglo-Saxon Protestant American (working and middle classes variety [sic]) . . ."

Nonsense. Mr. Walker supposes on a sophomoric level. The story in no way deals with class. Patriotism cuts across class lines. The people in the story are obviously class*less;* they are simply the residents of a small town. An *entire* small town is arrayed against the protagonist, Lance Corporal Vernon Lestig, and quite the opposite of Mr. Walker's wonky perception, social status of the townspeople is a consideration that never arises.

Later in the Walker comments, I'm accused of always trying to be "cool," whatever that means to Mr. Walker. *Eternally cool* is the phrase he uses. I bring this up, out of sequence, because it ties in logically with Walker's characterization of the writing as evincing "Ellisonian power and imagistic magic," "manic ferver," "maniacal and revoltingly sadistic infatuation with violence," "nightmare vision," "an act of personal revenge upon humanity at large," "makes us see through fierce

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alien eyes the reality of rage and violence," "white heat," "the strongest possible dramatic effect," "sheer intensity of language"—all this and more he says of the writing . . . and that I'm simply mad to be *eternally cool*.

Far be it from me to suggest that Mr. Walker has *purée* of bat guano for brains, but if he can explain how all that crassilingual corybantism squares with "coolness," I'll buy him a terrific meal at The Mirage in Beverly Hills on the night of his choice (closed Mondays). I, and my work, have been accused of many things in the past quarter-century, but I'll be goddamed if "cool" has *ever* been one of them.

But Walker uses this specious hip-pocket Freudian codswallop to buttress his argument that "Basilisk" is a panegyric eulogizing the brutalization and punishment of WASPs. Why, shucks, Mistuh Walkuh, some of mah bestest frens is WASPs.

You see, I'm back in sequence again: if I'm trying always to be "cool" and contemporarily hip, to be against such convenient devils as bashing seals in the head with ball-bats and sexism and racism and war and stupidity and the leavening-out of the human race at the level of McDonald's toadburgers and Erich Segal novels, then I'm a shallow *poseur*, incapable of an honest artistic statement . . . which is precisely what Walker says of me.

But if he's wrong, as Joe Haldeman (who edited the anthology) and a gaggle of other critics have opined, then Walker is fulla ka-ka and he simply read into that story what he wanted to read into it, and knew what he was going to say before he sat down to do the reading. Lord knows, my personal boycott of states that haven't ratified the Equal Rights Amendment gives him terrific ammunition; he must have read that editorial in the same issue with his review and puffed up like a pouter pigeon.

But for him to be correct in his skewed perception that "Basilisk" is a diatribe against the white middle-class, born out of a cheap need to attack the currently unfashionable, then the story by all rights should have been, and I quote Walker again, ". . . the work of an unexamined conscience . . . (worked) out at white heat" and then "he (Ellison) stops thinking about it." But, sad to say, for Mr. Walker's position, "Basilisk" was first conceived in 1960. Because "Basilisk" is based on Francis Gary Powers, the U-2 pilot shot down while spying on Russia by means of a high-altitude overflight. It is based on the treatment that Powers received when he returned to his home town in Tennessee: hatred, ostracism, social and economic boycott, the debasement of his family forcing them to move away, forcing Powers into anonymity and a new identity. I was appalled at the bestiality of people considered "good citizens." I could not understand how they could applaud his having been a spy, then revile him for not having killed himself with the cyanide cap in his hollow back tooth. I began thinking about how far "patriotism" should take someone. To his own death to protect an illegal act?

Well, I worked on the idea, trying to codify my thoughts in terms of a contemporary story, but it didn't work. The closest I came to setting it down in the Sixties was as a story treatment for the *Route 66* television series, on which I was working in 1962-3. But it didn't work. So I set it aside. When the Viet Nam War began, the story came back to me. I need not go on at length about

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my anti-war activities during the Sixties and early Seventies. Suffice to say, I was one of the people who, at the Milford SF Writers Conference in 1968, initiated with Kate Wilhelm and Judith Meril and 79 others, the anti-war ad that ran in the June 1968 *Galaxy* (coincidentally, the issue in which "The Beat that Shouted Love at the Heart of the World," an ecology story, was published); I worked with the Veterans Against the War Committee; I did college lectures on the war; I supported in a number of ways the defense of the Kent State kids; I had my arm busted by cops at the Century City riot protesting the War when Johnson came to speak; and in many other ways validated my contention that insofar as the "unpopular cause" of protesting the War was concerned, I displayed anything but an "unexamined conscience." But though I had written anti-war stories as far back as 1958, when "Battlefield" was published (under the editor's title "His First Day at War") in the November 1958 issue of *Space Travel, "Soldier" in Fantastic Universe* for October 1957, and "Asleep: With Still Hands" in *If* for July 1968 . . . I did not deal directly with my obsession about the Powers/U-2 matter until the moment I wrote "Basilisk."

Then, having examined my conscience *endlessly* for fifteen years, I wrote what many people thought was a very unpatriotic story. It dealth with the unfairness of bloodthirsty non-combatants sitting on their suburban asses while sending off others to die for them, and then treating them like shit when they didn't do the "honorable" thing by killing themselves rather than surviving at whatever the cost of self-humiliation.

No, Mr. Walker has managed to assault my work and the integrity I try to bring to it, at precisely the point where I have solid credentials. "Basilisk" may have been written quickly, may even have been written at "white heat" as he suggests; but it was written with a decade and a half of examined conscience behind it.

I offer these credentials to anyone who cares to examine them, and to refute logically the moronic assertions Mr. Walker proffers as telepathic insights into my phoniness, duplicity, and lack of artistic honesty. Mr. Walker, were he not a recycled fan, with the tunnel vision and adolescent opinions one finds in the shallowest fan behavior, could easily have apprised himself of these facts. Were he a serious book critic, rather than a refugee from a fanzine, he would understand that a reviewer can only judge a work from internal evidence, that presuming to plumb the mind of the author is a mugg's game, and a dishonest game at that.

One final point. Mr. Walker says of me, "Without flattering him (Ellison, that is), he seems to be more interested in *being* than in having been." Now I haven't a clear idea what the hell that nonsense sentence means, but if Walker feels that a writer should divorce himself from the times in which he lives, that he should rest on past actions and beliefs rather than changing and growing as life progresses, then I submit Walker isn't fit to review *anyone*'s work, much less the work of those who try to stay *au courant* and committed. For me, and for my work, the words of Oliver Wendell Holmes seem most appropriate: "I think that, as life is action and passion, it is required of a man that he should share the passion and action of his time at peril of being judged not to have lived."

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There is yet another quote, that informs my work eternally:

> "Society and man are mutually dependent enemies and the writer's job [is] to go on forever defining and defending the paradox—lest, God forbid, it be resolved."
>
> —Arthur Miller, 1974

These are parlous times for me. I have taken a number of unpopular and inconvenient positions on matters of universal and genre concern. Unpopular and inconvenient for those who accuse me of being a flag-waver, a *poseur*. Somehow, though these attitudes on my part have netted me virtually nothing but insult and death threats (oh yes, friends, fans are capable of death threats; what I doubt is that they have the guts to do anything beyond write anonymous letters or make dead-of-night phone calls), these same critics twist rationality to opine that I'm making myself a fashionable writer by this means. They seem to think that by angering and alienating my readers I will widen and deepen my readership. And so fools like Walker cobble up irrational analyses that say an anti-war; anti-patriotism story is an attack on the poor, beleaguered WASP middle class. But it's all of a piece, and all goes to the heart of discrediting the messenger because the message is a troublesome one. Leads me to remember a stanza from François Villon's "The Testament":

> His gall breaks on his heart
> And he sweats God knows what sweat
> And no one can lighten his pain
> He hasn't child, brother, or sister
> Willing to stand in for him then.

And though there will always be, among the dear and good and intelligent I've met who happen, coincidentally, to be fans, a few smug, presumptuous and arrogantly ignorant natterers, like Mr. Walker, who isn't fit to carry Gordy Dickson's pencil case, I will continue to serve the demands of my own ethics.

Less than that, neither my devotion to my work nor the everlasting examination of my conscience will permit me.

Harlan Ellison
3484 Coy Drive
Sherman Oaks, Calif., 91403

P.S. There will no doubt be those who, reading this response, feel I've been unconscionably rude to Mr. Walker. I'm always bemused by the backlash reaction. It is one with Mr. Walker's "pity the poor WASP" routine. Pity the poor males being assailed by feminists; pity the poor slavemasters under attack by the darkies; pity the poor mass murderer being jailed for his crimes; let's stop kicking poor old Tricky Dick around. Well, to them as feels that way, I say as follows, in the words of "polite" Mr. Walker: if you are doing what is ostensibly a review of my writing, then don't shoot off your mouth and call me maniacal, phony, infatuated with violence and lots of etcetera, unless you want me to respond in kind.

For those of you unfamiliar with Mr. Ellison's epistolary career, the preceding is a carbon copy of the letter he has been publishing regularly in fanzines for the past 10 or 15 years. All the vituperation, the protestations of innocence, the recitation of his credentials are the same; only the names of the critic and the story criticized have been changed. This is, however, the most brilliant

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example of the genre I have read.

What can I say?

What was true of Mr. Ellison's story is true of his letter.

—Paul Walker

Dear JJ:

Paul Walker is the most uneven reviewer I've ever seen. His treatment of my own *In The Ocean of Night* was fumbling, I thought; he missed most of what was going on in the book. But his analysis of Ellison's work in this issue is brilliant. He illuminates the nagging doubts I've had about Ellison's mounting of the ramparts, by showing how intolerant Harlan is toward that much-maligned minority, Anglo Saxon Protestants, in "A Boy and His Dog." In this sense I think Ellison sometimes deprives his visions of their full power. He plainly feels some of that stuff, but the question is whether it means very much. His lasting work will probably not be the more fireworky.

Still, I should add that while Walker illuminates Ellison's work somewhat, I'm sure there is more to be said; he has only shown a facet of Ellison's work—the man himself is larger.

Gregory Benford

Physics Department
University of California
Irvine, Calif., 92717

Dear Sir:

Thank you very much for the appearance of the Cordwainer Smith story, "The Queen of the Afternoon."

Your comments prefacing each story in the anthology *The Best of Cordwainer Smith* were very interesting without detracting from the magnificent tales, and I would have greatly appreciated similiar information about this one. For instance, did his wife have much to do with it? Why was its publication delayed? Was there any particular story form employed?

However, my biggest question is also my simplest: Will there be more? I know several people who bought that issue who have not purchased an sf magazine for years. (As a regular reader of *Galaxy* I just considered it a marvelous and unearned bonus).

As a couple of added comment regarding your term as Editor, your choice of stories is interesting. I thought a couple of the shorter ones might be sharper in resolution, and I miss the artists *Galaxy* used to use. However, I still think *Galaxy* is far better than *Analog* and *F&SF*, both of which, especially the former, are very predictable. Thank you for your efforts and your time and attention, and, hoping for more Cordwainer Smith stories, I look forward to many years of excellent sf from *Galaxy* under your direction.

Sincerely,
Frank Ramirez

Bethany Theological Seminary
Butterfield and Meyers Road
Oak Brook, Ill., 60521

"The Queen of the Afternoon" was begun by Paul Linebarger in 1955; but for some reason, he never finished it. "Mark Elf," the closely related story published in 1957, was written in 1956. Both stories were intended as parts of a mini-trilogy about the three VomAcht sisters and how they returned to Earth. Genevieve Linebarger completed "The Queen of the Afternoon" last fall, and

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has since written the third story in the series, based on her recollections of Paul's plans for the story. —j.j.p.

Mr. Pierce:

I am a regular reader of *Galaxy,* and such my reading style is to begin with the features and go on to the stories. Your feature section of course contains your Directions column so it is one of my first stops.

Now to my point. Being a *Star Wars* fan I have read every word you've printed about it. I refer to Star Wars—Pro and Con. I've seen Star Wars a total of five times, and I've enjoyed it each time. And while enjoying it, I've never taken it to be science fiction. It is obviously (to me) Space Fantasy. The only thing in *Star Wars* I can find to be sci-fi-ish is the Force.

I look at *Star Wars* as a beginning for Hollywood, a welcome one. Just as the pulp fiction evolved into what we have today, Star Wars (meaning Hollywood) will evolve untill they finally reach the point of Heinlein, Asimov, Anderson, Simak, Ellison (I could name a pageful but what's the point?). I believe Hollywood has started the same path that magazines and books have already followed, and I know Hollywood People, there are two choices: either they will stay with the path and begin to produce *good* science fiction *(Forbidden Planet* was a fluke), or it will once again diverge from common sense and turn out stuff to equal *Lost in Space* (if they follow the latter course, I really believe we should try our best to ignore them).

As I said before, however, I think this is a start toward good science fiction. There is, I'm afraid going to be a barrage of cheap, trashy junk purveyed to us in the near future—alleged science fiction trying to band-wagon on the success of *Star Wars* and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (which I haven't as yet had the opportunity to see).

It is inevitable that Studio Executives will see that there intelligent adults out here that want to see science fiction that doesn't insult them. And when that happens we must be ready to give every movie that comes out of Hollywood a chance, either to prove itself or demonstrate its weaknesses.

It is encouraging to hear that Paramount Studios are going ahead with a *Star Trek* project—with Gene Roddenberry at the head. Television too is coming out with movies and pilots for sci-fi series. NBC is even considering *Stranger in a Strange Land!* While I'm hopeful about that last one I mentioned, I see little possibility that it will remain the story we've come to know and love (unless they don't let any censors near it). Let's not forget that it is our responsibility to let Studio Executives know what we like. We can write enthusiastic letters praising those projects we've enjoyed, and stay ominously silent about anything we are insulted by.

In another direction, I never saw Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* in a theatre, but I saw it when it was televised recently. Aside from the opticals and photography it *bored* me. It reminded me of a movie I saw in high school that was a simple catalog of expected technological advances. The only part I found to be Science Fiction was the Hal 9000 computer.

Sincerely,
Jan Swen Olund

P.O. Box 162
North Branch, Minn., 55056

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Ordinarily, I wouldn't run another Star Wars *letter. But unlike most who send them, you're bright enough to realize that the important thing is:* what happens next? *Perhaps the box-office disasters of turkeys like* Damnation Alley *and* Starship Invasions, *combined with the huge success of* Star Wars, *will finally get the message through. One can at least hope we won't be subjected to further insults like Harlan Ellison being called in by a major studio and asked to script a giant ant movie! —j.j.p.*

Gentlemen:

I am writing to offer my heartiest congratulations to Jeff Rovin on his review of *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. After his opinion of *Star Wars* coincided so neatly with my own, it seemed almost too much to ask that he would agree with me on *Close Encounters* as well.

Jay Kay Klein's comparison of *Star Wars* and *The Jazz Singer,* so apparently fatuous on the surface, is probably much more apt than he could possibly have known (it is obvious Klein has never seen *The Jazz Singer;* it was neither all talking nor all singing.). After all, *The Jazz Singer,* in its day, was a trite, cliché-ridden, hackneyed story, produced without imagination or creativity, but with a kind of mechanical novelty that caught on with the audiences of the time, and made the film a smash hit. There *were* great silent films released after *The Jazz Singer,* such as Keaton's *The Cameraman* and Chaplin's *City Lights*. Such films are still widely seen today, but no one ever goes to see *The Jazz Singer*. And with good reason; it's a *lousy* movie. It always was. In fifty years, I have no doubt, the reputation of *Star Wars* will rest with people who have not seen it, just as *The Jazz Singer's* reputation rests with people like Jay Kay Klein today.

Jim W. Lane

3618 Vermont St.
Long Beach Ca. 90814

Mr. Pierce:

After reading the editorial in your March issue, I wonder: was it a "call to arms" or a "trooper's lament?" If you really believe that we slothful sf fans can change things (maybe for the better) why don't you put a few pages of your magazine where your mouth is? Give us a "Directory of Idiots" and list the names, addresses, and crimes, if any, of the people you seem to be speaking against. Hell, let's face it. The resources of a magazine far outweigh those of most individuals. You're right, I sure don't know who my congressman is. Why should I? He doesn't know me, and I never voted for him. I don't know the people responsible for those sixty-odd permits needed to start a nuclear power plant, either. I'm not even sure exactly which government agency is supposedly responsible for regulating them.

Obviously, you do know. So why not share your wealth of knowledge? If you want change, act as the lever. Pournelle wails about research scientists getting laid off as the fusion works wind down. Who's responsible? Voters in general? The "Public?" Or is it some agency that doesn't think it wise to invest in research when welfare dollars buy so many more votes? Name names. I can promise you this: for every name you DO give, I personally will spend 13¢ and write a letter. It may only be "Pierce, you idiot, *this* guy I agree

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with!" but it will be written. (For that, would an old picture postcard of Niagara Falls do?)

Enough bitching. On to other things.

Star Wars was science fiction. So was *2001*. So was *Forbidden Planet*. So was *Frankenstein*. Each of these marked a major turning point. It is a sad commentary when the majority of what has been done is on the level of *The Incredible Fifty Foot Woman*. Or *Wild Wild Planet*. I'm really getting sick of people dissecting every movie made. So you didn't like *Star Wars*. Or *2001*. Look around. Do you see anything better being made today? If not, maybe you would like to get the chance to. The (sometimes modest) success of ANY science fiction movie is a definite plus for the entire field. Remember: without *Star Wars* we would never have gotten *Quark*.

Speaking of which . . . "space baggies?" I saw the pre-showing publicity. A SYT (sweet young thing) said "I've just seen the future, and it's funny." I must agree. Hysterical, no. Funny, yes. I don't know if space baggie T-shirts will ever be "in," but I can readily imagine some alien walking up to a McDonald's with a disposable single molecule protein container. What ever happened to the good old days when the female android in *Logan's Run* said "I'll check the main power supply" eight times in three minutes? Who said science fiction was devoid of humor and sex? 'Cause if the idea of a FEMALE android ain't both funny and sexy, I don't know what is. A male android, on the other hand, is merely dull. (The idea being, of course, that androids—real PROPER androids—are not only sterile but sexless. Anything else is merely a human being, dog or equivalent grown in a test tube.)

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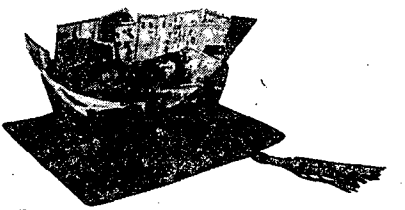

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A note to Pournelle: T. A. Heppenheimer apparently went to the same conference you did, and has published a book entitled *Colonies in Space*. The rectenna idea you discussed briefly is given in some length, along with a lot of other ideas. You might want to 'plug' his book in your column. Although it is written (in places) about as well as a typical cook-book, it has a lot of really nifty pictures. For us comic-book types, that's what makes it all worthwhile. It is a real shame you didn't write it yourself. Could you imagine *Mote* with NASA illustrations? Or *Inferno* with graphs, charts, and power consumption ratios? Or *A Spaceship For The King* with. . . .

James Meyer

6531 North 58th Street
Milwaukee, Wis., 53223

I rather doubt the publisher would let me run a list of all 535 senators and congressmen, but if you don't know who yours is, he probably knows who you *are. Or rather, his mail room does. Don't you ever get a "Report from Rep. Sludgepump," in which he brags about helping the Wisconsin economy by getting an SBA loan for a factory to produce gasoline from recycled chicken fat, together with a public opinion poll on questions like how Billy Beer is selling in Milwaukee?* That's *the guy to write to. Forget about the appointed bureaucrats; you don't elect them, so they couldn't care less what you (or I) think.*

On that sexy female android: what if she isn't properly equipped? —j.j.p.

Mr. Pierce:

I just read Olga Larionova's story in the April *Galaxy* and liked it immensely. As a science fiction reader and a student of Russian, I would like to read more Soviet science fiction—preferably in Russian. Can you give me any information about obtaining Russian language sf?

Bill Cates

P.O. Box 152
Forney, Tex., 75126

The only importer of Russian language sf I know of is Victor Kamkin's book store in Rockville, Md. He's the supplier for the few other Russian book outlets in the country. Last I knew, however, the Russians weren't sending much, even to him. The larger university and city libraries have some Soviet sf, but I don't know about Texas. Macmillan is publishing the best translations now; earlier translations are generally out of print except for DAW Books' paperbacks. —j.j.p.

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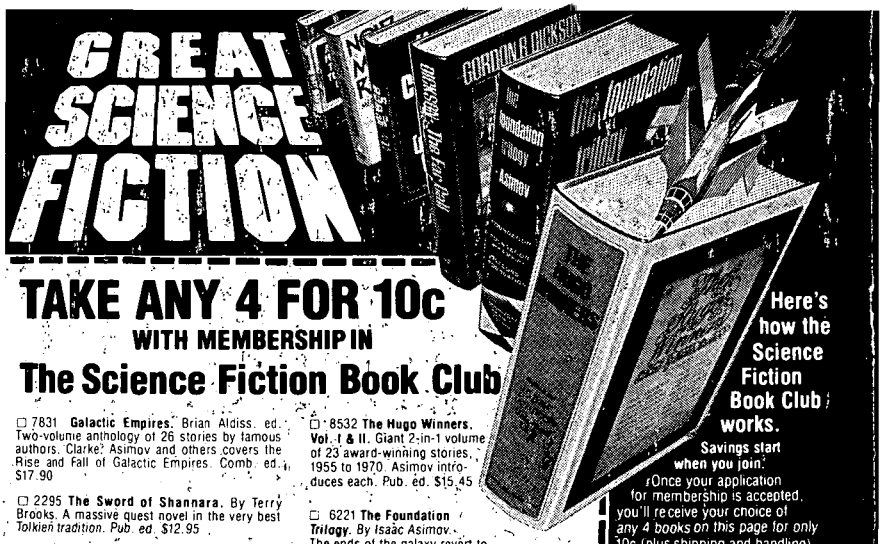

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